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Meister Eckhart's Parisian Question of 'Whether the omnipotence of God should be considered as potentia ordinata or potentia absoluta?'

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Meister Eckhart's Parisian Question of
'Whether the omnipotence of God should be considered as
potentia ordinata or *potentia absoluta*?'

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Abstract

Ever since the Latin term *omnipotentia* announced that God could do everything, the inevitable question was raised about the things God could not do. Manuscript, Vat. Lat. 1086 contains the *reportationes* of student Prosper taken from a *disputatio* in which his accomplished teacher, Meister Eckhart, considers whether the *potentia* of God should be considered as *ordinata* or *absoluta*. Through his astute mind and efficient administrative skills, Eckhart was re-appointed to the Dominican Chair of theology at the University of Paris circa 1312, and following his *Commentary on Exodus* and Latin *Sermon XXVIII*, this was the third occasion, that we know of, to expand his thoughts on how God actualises power, and the perceived power distinction. This previously unexplored treatment is in the middle of a series of questions which present a developing image of the thinking of this Meister who stretched notions of God beyond any boundaries.

The first part of this thesis issue reviews how the question of a power distinction reached Eckhart. The all-powerfulness of the one God had seen anthropomorphic Hebrew roots adapted to incorporate Greek aspects of a more abstract, sustaining and emanating oneness. The 13th Century, saw turbulent times in Paris with disputes between the university, its students, the church, and not only between mendicant orders but also within them, meanwhile, with scholarly advances, the terms of the distinction were refined to become a sharp issue for debate in the classroom and an available tool for refining the increasingly powerful canon law.

The second part reviews the codex with a new transcription and English translation. From this, a commentary of the text presents how the Meister considers earlier treatments on the power of God by notables such as Augustine and Thomas, and challenges them with a striking modification to the conception of the *potentia absoluta*. Through these notes which are substantiated by his other works, Eckhart forwards his own radical view, that God does not just perform actions distinctly in power, but is one, total, continuous, active, power.

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Part I. The background to *Parisian Question six*

Introduction

This chapter begins the exploration of *Parisian Question six*, the first of the recently re-discovered questions of Meister Eckhart by considering how the issue raised by the question had reached the Meister. *Question six* can be recognised as Eckhart taking the opportunity to engage in an ongoing debate that had featured repeatedly as the Church developed its doctrine of the omnipotence of God.

The term *omnipotentia* literally declares the power to be able to do everything and although we cannot question the magnitude of the power of God, there remains the question of how God exercises his power in the world. Being all-powerful clearly does not mean the same as being able to do everything. A distinction, between the things God is able to do and the things God actually does, generated a debate that reached far wider than this initial question of omnipotence.

When moving through the history of the debate, it is important to recognise that issues raised by the question are recorded and received with contemporary understanding. Eckhart's treatment is specific to his situation and so provides a contextual development that builds on the historical amendments already made. Progressive coverage of one particular issue can lead to its crystallisation as well as to an off-shoot of new tangents and each historical development of this debate presents a refinement rather than just repetition of the same argument. Tracing the key modifications from a theological and philosophical as well as historical perspective reveals why Eckhart was addressing a point of doctrine with contemporary significance. This question on power held different strands as Eckhart was not just dealing with an on-going theological debate using philosophy as a tool to develop a solution. The Meister was also addressing the practical issue of decision-making power within the Church concerning who held the power to do certain things and, even more, the unsolved arguments between the pope and the state leaders such as emperor Ludovicus Bavarus and various kings of France and England.

The precise wording of the power distinction in a specific instance is often less important than the issue being discussed because terms sometimes even veil what is emerging when contexts have changed and the theological, philosophical or juridical discussions have moved on. This account, therefore, will not only focus on the derivation of the term 'omnipotence', but will follow the moving contexts as the concepts evolved in a debate that modified before they reached the Meister in early 14th century Paris.

I begin by considering the earlier Jewish and Graeco-Roman foundations that impacted on people's understanding of divine attributes, and more specifically of the almighty nature of God. Historical modifications occurred to the idea of the omnipotence of God from the Jewish scriptures through to the New Testament and especially as Christian doctrine was refined by creeds and other Patristic and philosophical writings which still resonate in Eckhart. The form of *Question six* developed during a time when emerging universities, mendicant orders and the Church were the key players in both the advance of education and the battleground for power. As the mediaeval period progressed, the nature of omnipotence became pertinent because the focus on the things God could or could not do would also be used to consider the will of God and authority within the Church. What began as an ascription of ultimate dominion was modified to incorporate the sustaining of everything created and, by the time of Eckhart, was to become a mechanism for the debate of delegated authority not just from God, but from the pope downwards.

The Sovereign God of Israel

As this discussion begins, it should be acknowledged that the aim is not to introduce a temporal understanding or point to a precise start of the discourse on omnipotence. Instead, this is an exploration into the God of Israel from the great variety of anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic attributes that are given to the Divine, from the Jewish scriptures, often even in auctorial self-descriptions. In particular, that God is what his creatures are not, namely that he is all powerful. Although the formal conception of the notion of omnipotence is not found, divine names convey might.¹ This powerfulness is declared in the narrative of God making a covenant with Abram that would be established through his almighty power, and this was sealed with the distinguishing mark of circumcision. At this moment the revelation of God as almighty, *El Shaddai*,² was given to Abram with the promise that he would become not only the

¹ Gerardus van der Leeuw shows how the 'object' of any religion is a highly exceptional and extremely impressive 'other', a departure from the usual, and this is the consequence of the 'power' it generates. See G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, repr. from 1938 (Princeton, N.J., 1986), 23.

² *Gen.* 17:1: '*postquam vero nonaginta et novem annorum esse coeperat apparuit ei*

father of an heir but also the father of the nation that would be the people of God. This covenant is then duly established, by God's almighty power, through the events of history beginning with the birth of Isaac and continuing through slavery before subsequent miraculous, significant and symbolic rescue from the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt.³ The experience is one that shows God is all powerful, in extension of his creation, the reliable saviour of a cosmos which by its very nature is not an endless abyss, and, although a lost, is still a recoverable paradise.

The revelation to Moses through the burning bush was treated extensively by Eckhart in his Exodus Commentary.⁴ Further revelations in the Jewish scriptures affirm God as the one who can do anything, especially the things that man cannot do. In securing his promise to Abram, he is even able to grant a baby for Sarah.⁵ Likewise just before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC, God told Jeremiah to buy a field in Anathoth. With the army of Babylon holding siege, this was not the time to invest in land, but it was a prophetic pointer towards what could be seen as an unlikely return in the future. In his prayer Jeremiah proclaimed the Sovereign Lord saying, 'You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for you.'⁶ Following Jeremiah's plea, God began His reply, 'I am the Lord, the God of all

Dominus dixitque ad eum ego Deus omnipotens ambula coram me et esto perfectus.' Bible quotes are given in Latin because an edition of the Vulgate would be the one available to Meister Eckhart, and also to his predecessors considered in this background. Edition used: *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem, ... recensuit et brevi apparatu critico instruxit Robertus Weber ... editionem quartam emendatam ... praeparavit Roger Gryson* (Stuttgart 1994) (Sigle: v). For an overview of divine names in the Jewish scriptures see C.H. Powell, *The Biblical Concept of Power* (London, 1963), 41-5, 72f; also for background on the term 'El' see M.S. Smith, *EL in Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, 2000), 384-6.

³ See *Exod.* 6:1-8.

⁴ See *Exod.* 3:14, Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 14-26 (LW II 20,2 – 31,14).

⁵ *Gen.* 18:14: '*numquid Deo est quicquam difficile iuxta condictum revertar ad te hoc eodem tempore vita comite et habebit Sarra filium.*' NIV, 'Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'

⁶ *Jer.* 32:17: '*heu heu heu Domine Deus ecce tu fecisti caelum et terram in fortitudine tua magna et in brachio tuo extento non erit tibi difficile omne verbum.*'

mankind; is anything too difficult for me?’⁷ God promised to restore his people to that land and, after Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon in 538 BC, the Jewish exiles were allowed to begin to return and rebuild Jerusalem.⁸ Throughout the scriptures, God has superior power in any situation and the ‘arm of God’ is mighty to triumph against any enemy so that, within the context of human existence, this is all that could be experienced or known.

It is no surprise, therefore, that especially in his *Commentary on Exodus*, Eckhart presents a lengthy treatment of God’s self-revelation as the one who *is*. The Meister considers Israel’s questioning of the name and nature of God before moving into his discourse on the omnipotence of God. This discussion on omnipotence includes his thoughts on the things that God can and cannot do and so compares directly with *Question six* of the re-discovered questions.

The key event of *Exodus* is the deliverance of God’s people from slavery in Egypt and this was wrought and to be remembered as the demonstration of the power of God active in this world. As with other recorded occasions when God’s power is encountered, there is the sense of comparison with human powers. God triumphed over Pharaoh as later he did when humbling Dagon in the Philistine temple⁹ and humiliating Baal on Mount Carmel.¹⁰

This type of experience is conceptualised by the term *Sabaoth* which occurs 283 times in the Jewish scriptures, together with Yahweh or Elohim, and for example, in the prophecy of *Amos* the three terms are juxtaposed to attribute this name to God as the one who is powerful over all, yet present to rescue his people.¹¹ The AV translates YHWH *Sabaoth* as the ‘Lord of Hosts’ with the hosts being everything earthly or heavenly, human or

⁷ Jer. 32:27: ‘*ecce ego Dominus Deus universae carnis numquid mihi difficile erit omne verbum.*’

⁸ See *Ezra* 1:1-3.

⁹ See *1Sam.* 5: 2-7.

¹⁰ See *1Kgs.* 18: 19-39.

¹¹ *Amos* 4:13: ‘*quia ecce formans montes et creans ventum et adnuntians homini eloquium suum faciens matutinam nebulam et gradiens super excelsa terrae Dominus Deus exercituum nomen eius.*’ Masoretic text, יהוה (YHWH), אלהים (Elohim), צבאות (Sabaoth).

spirit,¹² but more recent versions such as the NIV tend to speak of the ‘Lord Almighty’ and the NLT restores the idea commanding over all things military by referring to the ‘armies of Heaven’. Whoever is referred to by this term, is above and lord over the hosts of heaven and the citizens of the earth. Lordship means he is able to accomplish what he desires.¹³ The prominence of ascribing absolute power to God within Judaism and early Christianity leads Powell to conclude that, ‘The God of the Bible is the God of power.’¹⁴ This is ultimate power and dominion and everyone and everything is subject to it because no one has the power to compare.

The permeation of Hellenism

Throughout history, political events have been accompanied by cultural change and so concepts modify while the terms used to describe them are introduced and adapted. Neither God nor his power may change but our concept of this power and the terms used to describe it, do. The conquests of Alexander, (356–323 BC), were accompanied by the ideas and practices of Hellenistic culture although there is archaeological, epigraphic and literary evidence to suggest that this was already well advanced before political dominance.

One consequence of Greek domination was the spread of the Greek language and the production of Greek translations of the Jewish scriptures such as the Septuagint, known as the *LXX* from the seventy, or maybe seventy-two, scholars doing the translating. The history of the origin of this translation is embellished with various fables so that accurate dates to locate this endeavour are not known other than within the 3rd century BC.¹⁵ In transferring from Hebrew to Greek, *LXX* translators would be well aware of the concepts presented by terms like *Sabaoth* and *Shaddai* as well as the contemporary terms and ideas,

¹² *Ps.* 24:10, YHWH *Sabaoth*, KJB, NASB, RSV, ‘The Lord of Hosts’.

¹³ *Ps.* 24:10, YHWH *Sabaoth*, NIV, ‘The Lord Almighty’, NLT, ‘The Lord of Heaven’s armies’.

¹⁴ C.H. Powell, *The Biblical Concept of Power* (London: 1963), 5.

¹⁵ An English translation of the *LXX* by Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton was published by Samuel Bagster and Sons of London in 1844. In his preface, Brenton presents something of the issues around the dating and production in the 3rd century BC. For a more modern account see J.M. Dines, *The Septuagint* (London, 2004).

but, in the words of the Greek translator of *The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira*:

Things originally spoken in Hebrew have not the same force in them when they are translated into another tongue, and not only this, but the law itself (the Torah) and the prophecies and the rest of the books have no small difference when they are spoken in their original language.¹⁶

From this writer's angle there was something being lost in translation, and maybe this indicates the awareness of the detrimentally changing nature of concepts from their traditional Jewish understanding. To express the idea of possessing the power to do all things, the Greek term *dunamis* could have been used, however, this was not the moment to present potential power, but active dominance, and so the *LXX* used the term *pantokrator*, formed by combining *pas* (all) with *kratos* (might). This was the adaption of a Greek term that had also been used, according to Feldmeier, 'In the pagan sphere ... as an attribute of deities such as Hermes, Eriunios Hermes, Isis and the Egyptian sun-god Mandulis.'¹⁷

The *LXX* records the term *pantokrator* 170 times, confirming the desire to align the Sovereign God with the all-conquering Alexander who presented himself as the sole power in his empire and the executive decision maker. It is not that the term *pantokrator* was used contemporaneously for Alexander but that his conquest and dominion provided a pointer towards the idea comprehended by the term. The ruler was the supreme power in the empire but one who had to impose this power in order to retain it.

The extent to which Hellenistic culture should be embraced found a mixed response from Jewish society, and in religious circles, tradition needed to be protected. In Alexandria the *LXX* facilitated the introduction of Greek philosophy into the interpretation of Scripture as a way to Hellenise Hebrew concepts but in Judea it was initially a document of betrayal and the old Italian proverb, '*Traduttori, traditori!*', Translators are traitors!' might be an appropriate way to describe its reception.¹⁸ Whether translators in Alexandria were from

¹⁶ *Sir.* prologue. See O. Wischmeyer, 'Die Kulture des Buches Jesus Sirach', *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 77 (Berlin, 1995).

¹⁷ R. Feldmeier, 'Almighty' in K. van Der Toorn, B. Becking and P.W. van Der Horst (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1999), 20-3.

¹⁸ Catherine Porter explains the difficulty of accurate translating using the *LXX* as an example for this maxim, probably from the 19th century. See C. Porter, 'Translation as

a Jewish or Greek background could account for opposing views but mystery surrounding the production means no definitive view can be guaranteed.

Feldmeier believes the extensive use of *pantokrator* in the *LXX* was a Jewish response to Greek domination in a bid to emphasise that God is sovereign over worldly political powers, and in apocryphal literature likewise, there was a looking to the *pantokrator* to overcome invading infidels. Although the historicity is uncertain, dramatic events occurred in 168 BC, when the Temple in Jerusalem was seized by Seleucid soldiers and dedicated to the worship of Zeus. In the following year, the Seleucid emperor, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, made the observances of Judaism, such as circumcision, illegal. He also ordered all Jews to worship Greek gods and defiled the temple by offering a sow upon the altar and scattering its juices over all the sanctuary.¹⁹ What seems like a violent incursion was in fact encouraged by the party of Jews keen on Hellenisation and as Oesterley records, ‘Emphasis needs to be laid on the fact that the desire to Hellenise the Jewish State was expressed by the Jewish political leaders’ years before Antiochus Epiphanes took a hand in this.’²⁰ Alternatively Schäfer suggests that the Hellenisers were very much the minority compared with the faithful adherents of the Torah. The Maccabean revolt in 166 BC reclaimed the temple for appropriate sacrifice with the rededication of the temple taking place in 164 BC, on the third anniversary of the day on which the heathen sacrifice had been offered.²¹ The name Maccabee has been taken for the dissident army but should more specifically relate as an epithet to the leader of the revolt, Judah. The origin of the name Maccabee is uncertain although one explanation is that it is from the Aramaic *makkaba* for ‘hammer’ because a hammer blow struck the

Scholarship’, in E. Allen and S. Bernofsky (eds), *In Translation: Translators on their work and what it means* (New York, 2013), 60.

¹⁹ For a detailed Jewish description of atrocities against the Jews by Antiochus in Judea see *1Macc.* 1:20-8 and *2Macc.* 5:11-7.

²⁰ W.O.E. Oesterley, *A History of Israel*, vol. II (London, 1932), 217.

²¹ See P. Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World* (London, 2003), 44-58. This ceremony of consecration of the Temple is celebrated as the feast of Hanukkah on the 25th of Kislev.

enemy.²² Another theory is that the word stems from the same root of the verb, *yikavenu* used in Isaiah and meaning, ‘shall be named [by the Lord]’.²³ Pearlman also provides a traditional Talmudic explanation, that Maccabee (מַכַּבִּי) is an acronym for the Torah verse that was the battle-cry of the Maccabees, ‘*Mi chamocha ba'elim YHWH*’, ‘Who is like You among the Elohim, Yahweh’. This exclamation, taken from ‘The Song of Moses’²⁴, recorded after the defeat of Pharaoh, is one of God as the victor in battle, rescuing his people to settle them in their own land. This song coincidentally happens to provide the backdrop to the key passage in Meister Eckhart’s *Commentary on Exodus* in which he discusses omnipotence in the context of the names of God.²⁵

The book of *Judith*, written between 150 and 100 BC with the earliest copies being in Greek rather than Hebrew, mentions *kyrios pantokrator* five times always in the context of inimical threat either still existing or having been repelled. Significantly, the final ‘Song of *Judith*’ ends with the prospect of the ultimate victory of *kyrios pantokrator* against all the enemies of God’s people saying, ‘Woe to the nations that rise up against my people. The Lord Almighty will punish them on the day of judgement.’²⁶ This is a record of a Jewish writer using a Greek term, *pantokrator*, to refer to the almighty God of Israel who had the power to overthrow any enemy and would ultimately hold dominion.

²² See M. Pearlman, *The Maccabees* (London and Jerusalem, 1973), 87-8, W.O.E. Oosterley, *A History of Israel*, vol. II (1932), 229, P. Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World* (2003), 46.

²³ *Isa.* 62: 2: ‘*et vocabitur tibi nomen novum quod os Domini nominabit*’.

²⁴ *Exod.* 15:11: ‘*quis similis tui in fortibus Domine*’, NIV: ‘Who among the Gods is like you, Lord?’

²⁵ Eckhart, *In Ex.* 27-78 (LW II 32,2-82,8), see B. McGinn, *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher* (London and New York, 1987), 50-70.

²⁶ *Jdt.* 16:17: ‘*vae genti insurgenti super genus meum Dominus enim omnipotens vindicabit in eis in die iudicii visitabit illos.*’ Carey notes how the eschatological nature of this verse supports the view that *Judith* was composed during the Hasmonean period. See C.A. Moore, ‘*Judith*, a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary’, *The Anchor Bible* (New York, 1985). Also R. Feldmeier, ‘Almighty’ in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* (1999), 20-3. Other verses in *Judith* referring to omnipotence: 4:13, 8:13, 15:10, 16:5, 16:20.

As well as overpowering dominance, a vital key to a successful period of rule is to bring order. The idea of bringing order can be traced back to the *Genesis* 1 account of creation which reveals chaos²⁷ being replaced by meaning and purpose. In Greek writings, one from about 250 BC., the *De mundo*, a work attributed to an anonymous ‘Pseudo-Aristotle’, contains a comparison between god and the ‘Great King of Persia who both possess powers, *dunameis*, and are likened as bringing law through a delegated hierarchical system. In a tribute to Greek supremacy it is explained that god exercises order from the highest place in the *Cosmos* and does not directly involve himself in the affairs of the world. The writer states:

Now the authority of the Great King compared to that of God who has power over the cosmos must be considered just as much weaker as the authority of the most inferior and weakest creature compared to that of the King, so that, if it would be undignified for Xerxes to appear to do all things himself and to complete what he wanted to be done and to oversee and administer all things [everywhere], it would be much more unbecoming for god.²⁸

The *De mundo* goes on to reveal more on the nature of god who is described as *kosmokrator* rather than *pantokrator* presenting the connection between power and order. The Greeks had conquered and sought to secure their gains through delegation but history shows it was the Romans who brought peace and order to replace, what was for them Greek chaos and, while this involved delegation, it never aimed to achieve a democratic society. Especially with the Roman Empire, the supremely powerful emperor held absolute authority and his rule was exercised by the state with a delegated structure at

²⁷ The *tohu* and *bohu* of *Gen.* 1:2 also appear together in *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah* and are pictured variously as without form and void, an unformed lump, (*Geneva Bible*), a formless, lifeless mass, (Karl and Delitzsch *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*). On the balance of regional opinion, Phoenician, Egyptian and Babylonian ideas all speak of a dark, windy chaos, (J.S. Exell, H.D.M. Spence-Jones, *Pulpit Commentary*, 1884).

²⁸ Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo*, 6, 398b, 1-6, in J.C. Thom (ed.), *Cosmic order and Divine Power* (Tübingen, 2014), 45.

work providing organisation.²⁹ Roman dominance allowed for the Jewish political system to function, but Josephus highlights the tension this created especially leading to revolt and destruction of the second temple in 70 AD. As Sarah Pearce points out, Josephus provides the most accurate, if not objective, portrait of the situation in Judea during this period, because his selection and organisation of details emphasise turbulent times and the almost inevitability of revolt and catastrophe.³⁰ The reception to Roman power was clearly mixed and often challenged.

One way the ruler could enforce his presence on his subjects was through the issue of coins³¹ and it was during the Hellenistic period that coins were standardised by having a portrait, name and possibly emblem representing the king carved on to all coins. They symbolised the power of the ruler acting as a reminder to anyone using money that they were subject to his dominion. The Greeks used coins to symbolise their great empire but it was the Romans who advanced the connotation of governing power, and by the 4th century AD, during the time of Diocletian, the portrait became a stern caricature to emphasise the power of the emperor. Inscriptions would include the emperor's name, and maybe some titles to give honour or some reference to victories in battle. They were a reminder of the presence of a powerful leader and even deity or, for instance, a Roman coin from the time of Jesus showed the likeness of former emperor Caesar Augustus and the Latin inscription, "Augustus, Son of the Divinised Caesar", which would be provocative to both Jewish tradition and Christian thinking.³²

²⁹ See J.W. Marshall and R. Martin, 'Government and Public Law in Galilee, Judea, Hellenistic Cities and the Roman Empire' in A.J. Blasi, J. Duhaime and P. Turcotte (eds), *Handbook of Early Christianity* (Walnut Creek, 2002), 409-30.

³⁰ See S. Pearce, 'Judea under Roman Rule: 63 BCE-135 CE' in J. Barton (ed.), *The Biblical World*, vol. 1 (London and New York, 2002), 458-91. Also J.S. McLaren, *Turbulent Times, Josephus and Scholarship on Judea in the First Century CE* (Sheffield, 1998); T. Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His society* (London, 1983).

³¹ Karsten Dahmen presents how the portrayal of Alexander the Great on Greek and Roman coins immortalises the legend of Alexander's military virtue, fame and place in history. See K. Dahmen, *The Legend of Alexander the Great on Greek and Roman Coins* (Abingdon, 2007).

³² See B.D. Ehrman, *The New Testament. A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 2000), 16-54.

The gospel writers referred to this purpose of coins by recording the event when the Pharisees aimed to trap Jesus by asking if it was right to pay tax, which may, at the later time of writing, have been the *Fiscus Iudaicus*,³³ instituted by Vespasian after the fall of the temple in Jerusalem. Originally the self-imposed tax by the Jews, to fund the temple, tax was not just payable by the men aged between 20 and 50 but all Jews regardless of age or gender. To add insult to injury, the tax may well have been sent to Rome to fund the newly built temple of Jupiter.³⁴ The question was dealing with the issue of giving honour to God and not to any man, not even the emperor. Jesus responded by asking whose head was on a coin to show that it was right to give Caesar what was due to Caesar. In doing this Jesus acknowledged the power of Caesar, but by adding that it was proper to give to God what is due to God, sovereignty over Caesar, whether displayed as divine on a coin, or otherwise, was maintained.

Another medium used to portray power thorough an image can be seen in the striking example of Byzantine art in the mosaic displayed in the apse of the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, which dates between 526 and 547 AD.³⁵ The mosaic is displayed close to one depicting the East Roman Emperor Justinian so that a comparison is made between Christ and Justinian to show Justinian's right to rule. Of even more interest is that this image, of the young, clean-shaven, short-haired Christ sitting above the sphere of the earth, is a depiction in direct association with Alexander as the youthful *pantokrator*. A more standardised icon of 'Christ the *Pantokrator*', with his left hand holding the gospels and the right hand giving a blessing, became widespread later in the 6th century; examples of which can be seen in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul.

While the Romans provided structure and mobility it was Greek thinking that permeated contemporary culture and progressive developments in philosophy continued to mould the changing society and its language. The early Christian writers could blend ideas from

³³ See M. Heemstra, *The Fiscus Iudaicus and the Parting of the Ways*, WUNT, 2 (Tübingen, 2010), 1-84. (The issue of the dating of gospel accounts and historicity is not significant to this thesis).

³⁴ See C.B. Zeichmann, 'Martial and the *fiscus Iudaicus* Once More', in *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 25 (2015), 111-7.

³⁵ *The Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna*, photography Paolo Robino (Modena, 1997), 248-54. Christ Cosmocrator, 251.

Roman order and Greek thinking into Hebrew tradition to frame their concept of God's sovereignty using developing flexible, Greek terminology.

The idea of an all-powerful, but distant God was modifying such that to impute God as *pankratēs* would be to extol the one who was both almighty and all-sustaining. The root verb, *krateo*, is found from Homer onwards to signify possessing might and the term *kratein* was used later for the actions of seizing power and holding on to something. For instance, from the *LXX*, the men (angels) grasped the hands³⁶ of Lot, his wife and daughters when fleeing Sodom. The emphasis of either dominion or sustaining power is presented by the way the noun is declined. The idea of power as dominion was expressed by using *kratein* with the genitive case, however, when considering God's power as providentially sustaining the universe, *kratein* was followed by the accusative case because that was used to express 'holding' rather than 'reigning'. Use of *kratein* with the accusative occurs in *Revelation* when the Lord is the one who holds the seven stars, (ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας).³⁷ In *Rev.* 1:16 the Lord 'had' (ἔχων) the seven stars in his hand but, according to the '*Pulpit Commentary*' this use of *kratein* in *Rev.* 2:1, represents a stronger symbolic expression of seizing hold, holding fast and having control.³⁸ Hommel's etymology of *pantokrator* shows that verbs like *sozein*, *sunechein*, *periechein* and *diakratein* in combination with accusatives like *ta panta* and *ta hola* were used abundantly in Greek philosophy to indicate the sustaining function of the divine providence.³⁹ He traces this terminology back to the great Milesian philosophers Anaximander and Anaximenes, then later on, to Plato's *Timaeus* which promoted the idea of god's (the demiurge's) preservation of his creation, before noting the term *kratein* was

³⁶ *Gen.* 19:16: '*dissimulante illo adprehenderunt manum eius et manum uxoris ac duarum filiarum eius eo quod parceret Dominus illi.*' *LXX*, 'ἐκράτησαν οἱ ἄγγελοι τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς χειρὸς τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν δύο θυγατέρων αὐτοῦ.'

³⁷ *Rev.* 2:1: '*angelo Ephesi ecclesiae scribe haec dicit qui tenet septem stellas in dextera sua qui ambulat in medio septem candelabrorum aureorum.*'

³⁸ See *Pulpit Commentary*, *Rev.* 2:1. See also *Rev.* 2:25, 3:11.

³⁹ H. Hommel, *Schöpfer und Erhalter* (1956), 81-137, also see H. Hommel, '*Pantokrator*' in: H. Kruska (ed.), *Theologia Viatorum: Jahrbuch der kirchlichen Hochschule Berlin*, vol. V (1954), 322-78; G. van den Brink, *Almighty God, A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence* (Kampen, 1993), 51-2.

found in the works of Stoic thinker, Posidonius (c.135–51 BC), who would later influence Philo.

The Hebrew / Greek synthesis of Philo

A fusion of Jewish and Hellenistic thought is seen in the works of Philo (c.20 BC–40 AD), who reflects a typical 1st century BC and AD mixture of the gods and transcendent powers of Stoic and Platonic thought with monotheistic Hebrew tradition. Philo resisted any anthropomorphic ideas of God within Jewish tradition by distancing the singular God from the plural powers in action. He spoke of God as one⁴⁰ but also of many gods⁴¹ and this is a typical example showing the difficulty of ascertaining a clear synopsis of Philo's thinking.

When speaking of God, Philo preferred the term *dunamis* to refer to the potentiality of power rather than the active power of *kratein*. He uses *krateo* in the sense of seizing hold (of the reins of a chariot),⁴² and also to become the master (of a new art)⁴³ but these do not associate with the divine. The term *pantokrator* could point to the person activating power and so was avoided. His writings about powers are not totally consistent but they do present God as surrounded by a number of powers. Grundmann suggests Philo has built his ideas on those of Posidonius and so, 'The world is to be regarded as a great nexus of divine powers which create and sustain its life and being.'⁴⁴ Describing the occasion when there was a revelation of God's glory to Moses, Philo says,

And I look upon thy glory to be the powers which attend thee as thy guards.⁴⁵

In this case God is distinct from his powers. The nature of God is unknowable but we perceive God's existence through the actions of these powers which both emanate from, and yet are distinct from the divine person.

⁴⁰ Philo, *Legum allegoriarum*, Liber III, 82.

⁴¹ Philo, *De Specialibus legibus*, 2.164.

⁴² Philo, *Leg. Alleg.*, Liber I, 73: 'ἀδικία κρατεῖ'.

⁴³ Philo, *Leg. Alleg.*, Liber III, 92: 'περικρατήσαι'.

⁴⁴ W. Grundmann, 'Dynami ktl' in G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds), *Theological Dictionary to the New Testament* vol. 2, trans. G.W. Bromiley (1965), 299.

⁴⁵ Philo, *De Spec*, 1.45.

The monotheism of Judaism is seen in Philo's transcendent God while Hellenistic thought is seen in the immanence of these powers as hypostases from God. This tension is further revealed when he writes of the eternal and temporal aspects of God in *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit*:

For thus God allotted three days to eternity before the appearance of the sun, and those which came after the sun he allotted to time; the sun being an imitation of eternity, and time and eternity being the two primary powers of the living God; the one his beneficent power, in accordance with which he made the world, and in respect of which he is called God; the other his chastening power, according to which he rules and governs what he has created, in respect of which he is further denominated Lord, and these two he here states to be divided in the middle by him standing above them both.⁴⁶

The elements of the main two ideas of *kratein* are present as extensions of the supreme God in that there is dominion and preservation. As *dunamis charistike*, (elsewhere *poiètike*) there is God, *Theos*, who is the good and boundless power by which all things were ordered and created. This is beneficent power permeating the world. The other power, *dunamis kolastiken*, (elsewhere *basilike*) is the regent power and also the punitive power known as *logos*, or lord, *kurios*, of all. In this case the *logos* is one of two key powers coming from God directing and chastening the world. In other examples the *logos* seems to exist between God and the active powers:

In the first place [there is] he who is elder than the one and the monad and the beginning. Then [comes] the logos of the existent one the truly seminal substance of existing things. And from the divine logos, as from a spring, there divide and break forth two powers. One is the creative [power] through which the artificer placed and ordered all

⁴⁶ Philo, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit*, 165-6: 'αἱ γε μὴν πρὸ ἡλίου τρεῖς ἡμέραι ταῖς μεθ' ἡλίον ἰσάριθμοι γεγονάσιν, ἐξάδος τμηθείσης ἰσότητι πρὸς αἰῶνος καὶ χρόνου δῆλωσιν· αἰῶνι μὲν γὰρ τὰς πρὸ ἡλίου τρεῖς ἀνατέθεικε, χρόνῳ δὲ τὰς μεθ' ἡλίον, ὅς ἐστι μίμημα αἰῶνος. τὰς δὲ τοῦ ὄντος πρώτας δυνάμεις, τὴν τε χαριστικήν, καθ' ἣν ἐκοσμοπλάσται, ἢ προσαγορεύεται θεός, καὶ τὴν κολαστικήν, καθ' ἣν ἄρχει καὶ ἐπιστατεῖ τοῦ γενομένου, ἢ προσονομάζεται κύριος, ὑπ' αὐτοῦ φησιν ἐστῶτος ἐπάνω μέσου διαστέλλεσθαι.'

things this is named ‘God’. And [the other is] the royal [power] since through it the creator rules over created things; this is called the ‘lord’.⁴⁷

The ordering of this seems to place the *logos* as a mediator between God and the world such that to God the *logos* connects with creation and to creation the *logos* connects with God. The *logos* is:

Neither unbegotten as God nor begotten as you but midway between the two extremes serving as a pledge for both; to the creator as assurance that the creature should never completely shake off the reins and rebel, choosing disorder rather than order; to the creature warranting his hopefulness that the gracious God will never disregard his own work.⁴⁸

Here the *logos* is divine reason, the eternal manifestation of God’s thinking, standing above the two active powers and so there is the strong relationship to God but not the indistinction of Christian theology.⁴⁹ Philo used the term *logos* more than 1300 times with reflections of Jewish tradition,⁵⁰ as word, and the Hellenistic concept of reason,⁵¹ but as these passages show, although there is a development of the idea of a *logos*, there is also a lack of consistency in the nature of this *logos*.

Philo’s determination to live out his beliefs presented a practical way to respond to philosophical thinking by exercising an ascetic lifestyle and Runia believes that this spiritual approach with his method of exegesis was influential saying, ‘Philo stands at the beginning of a new era. The Church fathers took over many of his ideas, not only various

⁴⁷ See Philo, *Quaes Ex*, 2:68 (extant in a Greek fragment).

⁴⁸ Philo, *Heres*, 206 trans. D. Winston, *Selections* 94: ‘οὐτε ἀγέννητος ὡς ὁ θεὸς ὦν οὐτε γενητὸς ὡς ὑμεῖς, ἀλλὰ μέσος τῶν ἄκρων, ἀμφοτέροις ὀμηρεύων, παρὰ μὲν τῷ φυτεύσαντι πρὸς πίστιν τοῦ μὴ σύμπαν ἀφηνιάσαι ποτὲ καὶ ἀποστῆναι τὸ γεγονὸς ἀκοσμίαν ἀντὶ κόσμου ἐλόμενον, παρὰ δὲ τῷ φύντι πρὸς εὐελπιστίαν τοῦ μήποτε τὸν ἴλεω θεὸν περιδεῖν τὸ ἴδιον ἔργον.’

⁴⁹ John 1:1, ‘*in principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum*’. ‘Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.’

⁵⁰ Philo, *De Sacrific de Abel et Cain*, 65: ‘ὁ λόγος ἔργον ἦν αὐτοῦ’.

⁵¹ Philo, *De Opif Mundi*, 25: ‘τὸ παράδειγμα, ἀρχέτυπος ἰδέα τῶν ἰδεῶν ὁ θεοῦ λόγος’.

fundamental philosophical themes, but also the insight that philosophy is not just an affair of the intellectually, but engages one's entire religious or spiritual life.'⁵²

The Early Church would not be able to adhere too closely to all of Philo's ideas but his blend of Jewish and Hellenistic ideas led the way for Christian thinking to adopt Platonic and Stoic thought especially in Alexandria. Elements of Philo can be seen in the works of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria and even more so in the Athanasian *Discourses against the Arians*, written to express the relation of the Father to Son.⁵³ Philo is interesting for this discussion, not just for his thoughts on God and power, but also for forging the links between Hebrew, Greek and Christian ideas and highlighting aspects both of similarity and contrast.

Greek influence in early Christian writings

The extent to which Stoic and Platonic ideas were embraced is not easy to measure but their influence on the shaping of Christian theology is unquestionable although the revelation of God as the one who sustains his creation was neither a new idea, nor one peculiar to Stoicism. God declares himself as sustainer when speaking through Isaiah, 'Even to your old age and grey hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.'⁵⁴ Stoicism provided a means to express this view of God as a sustainer, already present in the Hebrew Bible, to be developed and explained in relevant cultural terms by intellectuals, including Philo of Alexandria, who was in some places more Platonist than Stoic, as well as early Christian thinkers. Stoicism borrowed much from Semite sources fuelling a bitter rivalry between Hebrew and Stoic thinkers which, in turn, led to a persecution of the Jews in Alexandria.⁵⁵

⁵² D.T. Runia, *Philo and the Church Fathers* (1995): 9, for the influence of Philo on how the Church Fathers adopted Platonism see also C.J. De Vogel, 'Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?' *Vigiliae Christianae* 39: 1-62, (1985), 7-18.

⁵³ See C.J. De Vogel, *Platonism and Christianity* (1995), 12.

⁵⁴ *Isa.* 46:4: '*usque ad senectam ego ipse et usque ad canos ego portabo ego feci et ego feram et ego portabo et salvabo.*'

⁵⁵ See Philo, *De Confusione Linguarum*, *De Legatione ad Gaium*, 27 and 28, *In Flaccum* 10, Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, intro.

In New Testament writings, the word *dunamis* was used in the general sense for the power to do something, for example when Mary questioned how she could have a baby since she was a virgin the angel replied, ‘Nothing is impossible (ἀδυνατήσει) with God’,⁵⁶ and in the gospels, it is Jesus who often demonstrates the power of God by miraculously changing the course of events. When the Sadducees disputingly enquired about the resurrection, Jesus explained that they were in error because they neither knew the scriptures nor the power (δύναμις) of God.⁵⁷ On the question of salvation Jesus explained to the disciples, ‘With man this is impossible (ἀδύνατον), but with God all things are possible (δυνατά).’⁵⁸ When presenting the humanity of Jesus, the gospels also show the aspects that might be deemed to show a lack of power such that he was hungry⁵⁹ and tired⁶⁰ but, these have generally been taken as representing the fullness of humanity rather than any deficiency in divinity. In the epistles, Jesus is described as the power (δύναμις) of God, able to save both Jews and Greeks.⁶¹ The active power of God was conveyed by *dunamis* while *pantokrator* was used for the one who possesses sovereign power. In John's apocalyptic vision, the *pantokrator* is Jesus, the Lord God Almighty (ὁ Κύριος Θεὸς Παντοκράτωρ), the one who is the Alpha and Omega.⁶² *Pantokrator* is used throughout the *Book of Revelation* to present Jesus exercising the power of the Lord God

⁵⁶ Luke 1:37: ‘*quia non erit impossibile apud Deum omne verbum.*’

⁵⁷ Matt. 22:29: ‘*respondens autem Iesus ait illis erratis nescientes scripturas neque virtutem Dei.*’

⁵⁸ Matt. 19:26: ‘*apud homines hoc impossibile est apud Deum autem omniaabilia sunt.*’

⁵⁹ Mark 11:12: ‘*et alia die cum exirent a Bethania esuriit.*’

⁶⁰ John 4:6: ‘*erat autem ibi fons Iacob Iesus ergo fatigatus ex itinere sedebat sic super fontem.*’

⁶¹ 1Cor. 1:24: ‘*ipsis autem vocatis Iudaeis atque Graecis Christum Dei virtutem et Dei sapientiam.*’

⁶² Rev. 1:8: ‘*ego sum Alpha et Omega principium et finis dicit Dominus Deus qui est et qui erat et qui venturus est Omnipotens;*’ ‘Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ, λέγει Κύριος ὁ Θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ Παντοκράτωρ.’

Almighty as the, ‘One who was, who is and is to come,’⁶³ and as the King who reigns.⁶⁴ The term *pantokrator* bridged Hebrew to Christian writings and the absorption of Hellenism into Christian thinking can be seen through the development of what was inferred by the idea of God as *pantokrator* and the grammatical use of the term from its root *kratein* and the verb form *krateo*. Use of *kratein* by early Church writers suggests a source within Judaeo-Christian tradition, and research by Montevecchi and Capizzi concurs that virtually all non-Christian uses of *kratein* are later than the LXX, and so the connotation of the term was possibly influenced by the LXX.⁶⁵ The Jewish-Hellenistic idea of a *pantokrator* pointed to domination by Greek and then Roman emperors and enforced the need for God to be the one with the power to triumph over these enemies. The concept of the all-mightiness of God continued to portray all-conquering dominion but the Hellenizing influence meant that the *pantokrator* was also increasingly the one ‘involved’, not just in dealing with enemies, but as the ever-present sustainer, actively preserving his world. Philosophical and religious concepts for the nature of God developed according to historical events, and ensuing cultural adaptations, and the eloquent

⁶³ Rev. 4:8: ‘*et requiem non habent die et nocte dicentia sanctus sanctus sanctus Dominus Deus omnipotens qui erat et qui est et qui venturus est.*’, ‘καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος Κύριος ὁ Θεός ὁ Παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος.’

⁶⁴ Rev. 11:17: ‘*dicentes gratias agimus tibi Domine Deus omnipotens qui es et qui eras quia accepisti virtutem tuam magnam et regnasti.*’, ‘λέγοντες Εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, Κύριε ὁ Θεός ὁ Παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὅτι εἴληφας τὴν δύναμιν σου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐβασίλευσας;’ 15:3: ‘*et cantant canticum Mosi servi Dei et canticum agni dicentes magna et mirabilia opera tua Domine Deus omnipotens iustae et verae viae tuae rex saeculorum;*’ ‘καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ Ἀρνίου, λέγοντες Μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου, Κύριε ὁ Θεός ὁ Παντοκράτωρ· δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοί σου, ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν;’ 19:6, ‘*alleluia quoniam regnavit Dominus Deus noster omnipotens;*’ Καὶ ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν ὄχλου πολλοῦ καὶ ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῶν ἰσχυρῶν, λεγόντων Ἀλληλουϊά, ὅτι ἐβασίλευσεν Κύριος ὁ Θεός ἡμῶν ὁ Παντοκράτωρ.’

⁶⁵ O. Montevecchi, ‘*Pantokrator*’ in: *Studii in onore di A. Chalderini et R. Paribeni* (1957), 418; C. Capizzi, *Pantokrator* (1964), 70, see G. van den Brink, *Almighty God* (1993), 51.

Greek language was adopted and adapted to provide the means to express these Early Church developments.

Among early Christian writings, in the *Epistle to Diognetus*, from an unknown author around the mid-2nd century, it is declared:

Truly God Himself, the almighty (*pantokrator*), the creator of all things (*pantoktistès*), [is the one who sent his son.]⁶⁶

By using the two different terms together, the idea that God is both almighty and the creator are both distinct and yet connected in being the Father of Jesus. Clarifying the fatherhood of God in relation to the Son was to become an issue of growing importance as recognised by creeds during the 4th century. The context to this chapter of the epistle is the manifestation of the Son of God who is also described as the creator and fashioner (*demiurge*),⁶⁷ and so this passage adapts philosophical language to identify God as Father, and as the almighty creator, and sustainer. In the following paragraph, God the Father is the demiurge and so the term is used, though not specifically, as representative of either the Father or the Son. It should be noted that in classical Neoplatonism, as well as in Arianism the “*demiurge*” is different from God but the significance of this passage is the early designation of God as ‘*pantokrator*’, and that because of the use of the other predicates, there is no suggestion that this term was used to imply the sustaining rather than sovereign power of God.

Later in the 2nd century Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, in his ‘*Apology to Autolycus*’, gives a strikingly descriptive proclamation of God using philosophical terms to explain the divine actions. God is:

Lord, (*kurios*), because He rules over the universe; Father, because he is before all things; fashioner (*demiurge*) and maker (*poietès*) because He Himself is the creator (*ktistès*) and maker of the universe; the Highest, (*anoteron*), because of His being above all. But He is called almighty (*pantokrator*), because He Himself holds (*ta panta kratei* i.e. with acc.) and embraces all things. The heights of heavens, the depths

⁶⁶ Diognetus, *Epistula ad Diognetum*, 7, 2: ‘αὐτὸς ἀληθῶς ὁ παντοκράτωρ καὶ παντοκτίστης’.

⁶⁷ Diognetus, *Epistula ad Diognetum*, 7, 2: ‘τεχνίτην καὶ δημιουργόν’.

of the abysses and the extremities of the earth are in His hand; there is no place withdrawn from His action.⁶⁸

Theophilus begins this quote with acknowledgment that God is Lord. *Kurios* was used widely in Graeco-Roman culture to describe such as the owner of a vineyard, master of a slave or also the parent to child or husband to wife relationship. The *LXX* translated YHWH as *Kurios* while it had also been used earlier by Plato for lesser gods. To hold dominion implies there is something under dominion and in this instance, God is Lord over the universe. Secondly God is Father because he is the origin of all things. The implication is that the Father is before the Son, although there is no mention of such here, but this inference is seen in Philo,⁶⁹ who built on Plato's demiurge as the source of forms. Theophilus records thirdly the idea of God as the fashioner, maker and creator who is above all creation, and so he is beyond all which, in Platonic terms, would mean above creatures, spiritual powers and lower gods.

Following these Judaist and Platonic terms and concepts, Theophilus presents the term 'almighty', indicated by the 'but' which sets all-mightiness in a certain contrast to the terms already mentioned. Theophilus finds the term *pantokrator* so important that he also sees the need to define it, in order not to misread it in the Platonic sense of the previous terms. He derives *pantokrator* etymologically from '*ta panta kratei*', i.e. using the accusative case to infer holding, a use which as shown above can be also traced back to earlier times, but was certainly not the predominant interpretation in the time of Theophilus and in contrast with the above *Epistle to Diognetus*. It seems that Theophilus,

⁶⁸ Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum*, 1, 4 in: *The Early Church Fathers and Other Works*, trans. Rev. M. Dods, A.M. (1867), also G. Bardy (ed.), *Trois livres à Autolycus*, SC 20 (1948): 'κύριος δὲ ἐστὶν διὰ τὸ κυριεύειν αὐτὸν τῶν ὅλων, πατὴρ δὲ διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρὸ τῶν ὅλων, δημιουργὸς δὲ καὶ ποιητὴς διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν εἶναι κτίστην καὶ ποιητὴν τῶν ὅλων, ὑψιστος δὲ διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἀνώτερον τῶν πάντων, παντοκράτωρ δὲ ὅτι αὐτὸς τὰ πάντα κρατεῖ καὶ ἐμπεριέχει.' Dods translates *kratei* as rules but *ta panta* is accusative and the meaning is one of holding. See *Isa.* 46:4, footnote 54.

⁶⁹ Philo, *Spec.*, 2. 165: 'But if he is, whom all Greeks together with all barbarians acknowledge with one judgment, the highest Father of both gods and humans and the Maker of the entire cosmos.' 'ἐδ' ἐστὶν, ὃν μὲν ἅπαντες Ἕλληνες ὁμοῦ καὶ βάρβαροι, ὁ ἀνωτάτω πάτερ θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων καὶ τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου δημιουργός.'

from his perspective as a Christian author who not only uses a form of a Gospel-harmony, but sees the Jewish scriptures as his reference works, elaborated the idea of *pantokrator* in the light of quotes such as the one given from *Isaiah*, where God was understood as the all-powerful creator, because he was the one who holds and sustains his creatures. Further than this, like Philo before, Theophilus reads the Jewish Scripture in a Stoic way by pointing to this idea of the sustainer of everything.⁷⁰ This God holds and sustains his creation, and by holding everything in his hand he encompasses everything, meaning there is ‘no place withdrawn from His action’, there is no outside of God. Rather than just actively sustaining his chosen people, God is sustaining the whole of everything that exists.

The embracing of philosophy within theology during these first three hundred years of the Church could be characterised by two famous quotes that declare opposing opinions. While Tertullian was asking, ‘What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem’,⁷¹ Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215 AD) simultaneously claims to be quoting Numenius, the Pythagorean philosopher when asking, ‘What is Plato, but Moses speaking in Attic Greek?’⁷² Clement asserted that Moses provided the essentials of Plato's Ideas, and the best of Greek philosophy was an elucidation of Judeo-Christian theology. Barrett explains how this tension between Hebrew tradition and Greek thinking is blended by the ideas associated with the term *logos* and particularising it to present the incarnated word of God.⁷³ In the Jewish scriptures, God’s spoken word was regarded as the power of God, because God spoke things into action, such as creation,⁷⁴ and the longest *Psalms* comprises 176 verses explaining man’s need of God’s written word.⁷⁵ One powerful *New Testament*

⁷⁰ See G. van den Brink, *Almighty God* (1993), 52-3; C. Capizzi, *Pantokrator* (1964), 76.

⁷¹ Tertullian, *De Praescriptione*, vii. *ANF*, 1 (1885).

⁷² Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I.22, *ANF*, 2 (1885).

⁷³ See *John* 1:1-18; C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John* (London, 1978), 27-41; A. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (London, 2005), 94-9; D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge, 1995), 11-3.

⁷⁴ *Gen.* 1:3: ‘*dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux.*’ That ‘God spoke’ is repeated as a command ten times; see the *Pulpit Commentary*.

⁷⁵ See *Ps.* 119. Dahood opens his comments, ‘This great “Psalm of the Law”, the longest poem in the Psalter, is the literary composition of a psalmist whose earnest desire is to

illustration of the power of the word of God is given in the dialogue between the Roman centurion and Jesus.⁷⁶ The centurion's servant was elsewhere yet healed by the power in the spoken word (εἰπὲ λόγῳ) of Jesus. In Greek usage, the term *logos* was used by Heraclitus (c.500 BC) to denote reason and then adapted by Plato who added the wise man should move according to the *logos*, imitating and conforming himself to this reason.⁷⁷ Hellenistic influences led men to seek a universal law, which governed all men, and the Stoics, according to Laertius, believed this law to be the *Logos* and identified this as the right way to live like Zeus.⁷⁸

The challenge faced by Judaism, of what extent to embrace philosophy, was now also the challenge for Christianity. Philo, as shown above, picked up the idea of the *logos* in his blend of Judaism and Hellenism and he was followed in Alexandria by Christian scholars Clement, who wrote a detailed synthesis of Platonism and Christianity, and later Origen (c.185–c.254 AD). Origen was taught in Alexandria by Ammonius Saccas who also taught Plotinus (c.204–270 AD), although scholars disagree about the degree to which he

make God's law the governing principle of his conduct.' See M. Dahood, *Psalms III* (New York, 1970), 161-93.

⁷⁶ Luke 7:7-9: '*propter quod et me ipsum non sum dignum arbitratus ut venirem ad te sed dic verbo et sanabitur puer meus. Nam et ego homo sum sub potestate constitutus habens sub me milites et dico huic vade et vadit et alio veni et venit et servo meo fac hoc et facit. Quo audito Iesus miratus est et conversus sequentibus se turbis dixit amen dico vobis nec in Israhel tantam fidem inveni.*' Bock's treatment of Luke 7:1-10 deals with the sources and historicity of the account, the parallel between the authority of the Roman centurion and that of Jesus and the invitation to faith. See D.L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, 1994), 630-45; R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. J. Marsh (New York, 1963), 38-9.

⁷⁷ Plato, Republic, Vi, 500d, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (1952), 122.

⁷⁸ Diogenes Laertius, in trans. R.D. Hicks, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 7 (1925), 88: 'And this is why the end may be defined as life in accordance with nature, or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe, a life in which we refrain from every action forbidden by the law common to all things, that is to say, the right reason (logos) which pervades all things, and is identical with this Zeus, lord and ruler of all that is.'

embraced Platonism.⁷⁹ In a passage developing his Christology, Origen explains how the Father and the Son hold the same omnipotence and that therefore they are both called ‘Omnipotent’, but this title reflects active power as an ‘efflux’ of God:

I deem it necessary to give warning, however briefly, to prevent anyone from thinking that the title of Almighty belonged to God before the birth of wisdom, through which he is called Father for wisdom, which is the Son of God, is said to be a ‘pure effluence of the glory of the Almighty’. Let him who is inclined to believe this hear what the scriptures plainly proclaim; for it says that ‘thou hast made all things in wisdom’, and the Gospel teaches that ‘all things were made by him and without him was not anything made’; and let him understand from this that the title of Almighty cannot be older in God than that of Father, for it is through the Son that the Father is almighty... For it is through wisdom, which is Christ, that God holds power over all things, not only by his own authority as Master, but also by the voluntary service of his subjects.⁸⁰

Origen explains that God has power over all things and yet it is as an effusion from God (the best if a somewhat unpleasant translation!), and so this is a good example of the merging of the all-conquering Hebrew *Sabaoth* with Greek thought. Likewise adopting

⁷⁹ Tzamalikos is ‘baffled’ by the claim that *De Principiis* is labelled Platonic but Jacobsen acknowledges Origen is diverse although essentially an idealising Platonist. See P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology* (Leiden, 2007); A. Jacobsen, *Christ-The Teacher of Salvation. A Study on Origen’s Christology and Soteriology* (Münster, 2015), 14.

⁸⁰ Origen, *On First Principles*, I, 2, (ed.) P. Koetschau (1913), 42,22-43,10; English trans. G. W. Butterworth (1936 [repr. 1973]), 24: ‘*ne videatur alicui anterior esse in deo omnipotentis appellatio nativitate sapientiae, per quam pater vocatur; quoniam dicta est ‘aporrhoea omnipotentis gloriae purissima’ esse sapientia, quae est filius dei, ‘omnia in sapientia fecisti omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil’ et intellegat ex hoc quia non potest antiquior esse in deo omnipotentis appellatio quam patris; per filium etenim omnipotens est pater ... Per sapientiam enim, quae est Christus, tenet deus omnium potentatum, non solum dominantis auctoritate, verum etiam subiectorum spontaneo famulatu.*’

philosophical terms in his work ‘*Contra Celsum*’, Origen states that Celsus, who thinks Zeno was wiser than Jesus,

talks like one who does not understand in what sense God can do everything when he says, “He will not want to do anything unrighteous, and when he allows that he could even do what is unrighteous, but does not wish to do so.” ... For the power to do wrong contradicts his divinity and all his divine power ... For he himself is the reason of everything that exists; therefore, he is not able to do anything contrary to reason or to his own character ... We know that we may not understand the word “anything” of things which do not exist or which are inconceivable. But we do say that God cannot do what is shameful, since then God could not possibly be God.⁸¹

As well as speaking of omnipotence to develop his Christology, Origen here is stepping into the discussion about the thought of what God can or cannot do. This is an early reflection on the hypothetical capacity of God’s power and although he refutes the Stoics in dismissing Celsus, van Den Brink suggests Origen was clearly influenced by Greek ideas in the very fact that he entered this field of philosophical debate.⁸²

Other notable figures who incorporated philosophy to Christian thinking include Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–339 AD),⁸³ whose authority as a bishop was probably due to his skill as a statesman. He also wrote prolifically, including an ‘*Ecclesiastical History*’, and overall, his synthesis of theology and philosophy was received with respect, if a somewhat mixed response. In his eulogy, ‘*In Praise of Constantine*’ Eusebius says much about Constantine, and through this, the contemporary concept of the nature of God. Eusebius tells of how Constantine prayed and in a dream Christ told him to make a cross and this would be his safeguard against the enemies. In an unlikely victory of 312 AD, Constantine defeated and killed Maxentius in the battle of Mulvian Bridge, and then, ‘Sung his praises

⁸¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3,70 (SC 136, 158-61); 5,14; 5,23; See *Origen: Contra Celsum*, H. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1953), 175, 274-5, 281-2.

⁸² G. van den Brink, *Almighty God* (1993), 63.

⁸³ For a background to Eusebius and his ‘*Life of Constantine*’ see A. Cameron and S.G. Hall, *Life of Constantine* (Oxford, 1999), 1-53. Also H.W. Attridge and G. Hata, *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism* (Leiden, 1992); G. Bardy, *Historia ecclesiastica, Eusèbe de Césarée, Histoire Ecclésiastique* (Paris, 1952).

to God, the Ruler of all and the Author of Victory.’⁸⁴ The following year he issued the ‘Edict of Milan’, granting Christianity legal status and forbidding the persecution of religion. The shift made by Constantine from a western understanding of politics to the eastern political philosophy of the East Roman State, and thereby incorporating Hellenistic thought, was recognised by the physical shift of the capital from Rome to the city posthumously taking his name, Constantinopolis. Constantine identified his position as protector of the Church, and in this role, he convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. The proceedings were started after an introduction from a prominent bishop, (probably Eusebius of Caesarea),⁸⁵ and a grand speech from Constantine.

‘*In praise of Constantine*’ recognised his achievement as if he had brought the kingdom of God to earth through the Roman Empire. Eusebius heaped praise on Constantine and divine actions and attributes were bestowed such that Constantine became a type of Christ. Constantine was said to imitate the *Logos*, as given by Plato, to be holding Supreme dominion over the whole world’ (σύμπαντος καθηγεμών κόσμου),⁸⁶ bringing harmony and caring for the souls of the people.⁸⁷ Eusebius also stepped near the line of Arius occasionally, and did so when saying that the emperor is, ‘like the radiant sun, illuminating the empire’ (through his sons), ‘the Caesars, who reflect the light, which proceeds from himself.’⁸⁸ Eusebius goes further to say that the emperor is thus extended (διασκοπούμενος) throughout the world, directing the course of the empire... with harmony (συμφωνίας) and concord (ὁμονοίας),⁸⁹ which resonates with Philo’s idea of the *Logos* as an emanation.

As all-conquering emperors, Alexander and Constantine had a significant impact on the development of the concept of the power of God and the contrast between these two

⁸⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, I 29-38 Greek text in I.A. Heikel (ed.), Eusebius’s Werke, vol.1. (1902), trans. here and following E.C. Richardson, NPNF, Series 2, vol. 1 (1890).

⁸⁵ Eusebius does not identify himself as the speaker, but Sozomen does. See NPNF (1890), vol. 1, 522, notes 1 and 2.

⁸⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, ‘*Oratio de Laudibus Constantini*’, Greek text (ed.) I.A. Heikel, in Eusebius’s Werke, vol. 1 (1902), vol. 1, 1. 6.

⁸⁷ Eusebius, ‘*Oratio de Laudibus Constantini*’, (1902), 5. 1.

⁸⁸ Eusebius, ‘*Oratio de Laudibus Constantini*’, (1902), 3. 4.

⁸⁹ Eusebius, ‘*Oratio de Laudibus Constantini*’ (1902), 3. 4, 5.

dynamic and influential emperors is seen in how Hellenistic ideas were received. Alexander entrenched the idea that God is the sovereign power able to overcome any enemy. However, by legalising and promoting Christianity, the robust practice of law and order increased the sense of on-going preservation and it was Eusebius who expressed the benevolence of Constantine as if he were God's active power on earth. Alexander had accelerated the Hellenisation process but it was Constantine whose order directed the Hellenised development of the sustaining God into action. With the emphasis of order and harmony through the law, the application of the legal system as well as God's holy law, were now aspects to be included in the omnipotence of God debate. What were at one time distinct; i.e. power, the state, the legal system and the Church had now, to some extent, become embroiled, and this pattern thickened as the power and wealth of the Church grew.

Later in the 4th century Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–c.395 AD) expanded on the idea of *pantokrator* as a title attributed to God in his writings against Eunomius, who he says, believes the Son does not share in the high office of Almighty. Gregory moves through the names of God given by the Bible to show that when an office is presented, it is done so in respect of the ones who are in receipt of God's action in exercising that office. Names or titles express position but this reveals God's immanent power and contains the declaration of the operations of the divine loving-kindness in the creation. The term 'Almighty' is relative and

those then who enquire precisely into the meaning of the term Almighty (παντοκράτορ) will find that it declares nothing else concerning the Divine power than that operation which controls created things and is indicated by the word Almighty (παντοκράτορ), stands in a certain relation to something... He is Almighty (παντοκράτωρ) over one who has need of being ruled... Accordingly, when we hear the name Almighty (παντοκράτωρ), our conception is this, that God sustains in being all intelligible things as well as all things of a material nature. For this cause, He sits upon the circle of the earth, for this cause He holds the ends of the earth in His hand, for this cause He metes out leaven with the span, and measures the waters in the hollow of His hand; for this cause, He comprehends in Himself all the intelligible creation, that

all things may remain in existence controlled by His encompassing power.⁹⁰

Gregory begins by asserting that God holds dominion. The *pantokrator* is the one who performs the actions that establish control of all things. The verbs to sustain, hold and measure are intellectualised, even further than in Philo, to emphasise the Jewish-Stoic view of a powerful protector who orders what he contains and who measures and comprehends everything in Himself. The divine power in operation is described as being in relation to the ones under dominion and again, as in Theophilus, there is no outside, there is no abyss; there is no falling away from the one whose power (*dunamis*) surrounds everything. The anthropomorphic metaphor of the hand of God appears as the container of everything created. The Jewish scriptures portrayed this hand as more powerful than anything so that it is able to defeat anyone or anything and save the people of God. Jesus declared that those saved could not be plucked from God's hand⁹¹ and so this is a containing hand, able to save and hold on to the lost. The hand of God not only strikes opponents down, it serves as the means of God declaring and executing his purposes,⁹² and following the text from *Revelation 2:1* quoted earlier and into these early Christian

⁹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, 2/11, in P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds), trans. by H.C. Ogle and H.A. Wilson, NPNF, Series 2, vol. 5 (1893), 'τὸ τοίνυν τοῦ παντοκράτορος ὄνομα τοῖς ἀκριβῶς ἐξετάζουσιν εὐρίσκεται, μὴ ἄλλο τι σημαῖνον ἐπὶ τῆς θείας δυνάμεως, ἢ τὸ πρὸς τι πῶς ἔχειν τὴν κρατητικὴν τῶν ἐν τῇ κτίσει θεωρουμένων ἐνέργειαν, ἣν ἡ τοῦ παντοκράτορος ἔμφασις ὑποδείκνυσιν... οὕτω καὶ παντοκράτορ τῷ χρῆζοντι τοῦ κρατεῖσθαι... οὐκοῦν ὅταν τῆς παντοκράτορ φωνῆς ἀκούσωμεν, τοῦτο νοοῦμεν, τὸ πάντα τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ εἶναι συνέχειν, ὅσα τε νοητὰ καὶ ὅσα τῆς ὕλικῆς ἐστὶ φύσεως. Διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ κατέχει τὸν γύρον τῆς γῆς, διὰ τοῦτο ἔχει ἐν τῇ χειρὶ τῆς γῆς τὰ πέρατα, διὰ τοῦτο περιλαμβάνει τὸν οὐρανὸν τῇ σπιθαμῇ, διὰ τοῦτο περιμετρεῖ τῇ χειρὶ τὸ ὕδωρ, διὰ τοῦτο τὴν νοητὴν πᾶσαν κτίσιν ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιέχει, ἵνα πάντα ἐν τῷ εἶναι μένῃ τῇ περιεκτικῇ δυνάμει περικρατούμενα.'

⁹¹ *John 10:28*: 'et ego vitam aeternam do eis et non peribunt in aeternum et non rapiet eas quisquam de manu mea.'

⁹² *Dan. 5:5*, 'in eadem hora apparuerunt digiti quasi manus hominis scribentes contra candelabrum in superficie parietis aulae regiae et rex aspiciebat articulos manus scribentis.'

writings, the hand is now the containing vessel of the universe. God himself is the container, the vessel, and as such, is himself the containing boundary of everything. As we have already seen the term *krateo* implied to rule and then also to seize hold of to present both dominion and sustaining power. From these another use developed which is very significant to the development of this concept of *pantokrator*. The root of *krat* also formed the term *kratera* which was the word used for a mixing bowl that in particular was used for mixing water with wine. The *LXX* speaks of the bowl used to blend wine⁹³ although the Vulgate and Masoretic texts refer to the act of mixing rather than the bowl being used. The concept of God as the container and sustainer of all that exists can be pictured as the *kratera* with this thought of being the containing vessel. Instead of exercising and needing to exercise irresistible power to retain dominion, there is still the sense of being impregnable, but as the one who contains, and controls everything.



Illustration 1: Red Calyx-Krater

This red calyx-krater by Euphronios, known as the "Krater of Antaeus," appeared in Attica in around 530 BC. The rear shows a music competition, with a young man holding an aulos mounting a platform amid his seated companions, while on the front, the battle between Heracles and the giant Antaeus is taking place.

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⁹³ *Prov.* 9:5, ‘venite comedite panem meum et bibite vinum quod miscui vobis’; *LXX*, 9:3: ‘ἀπέστειλεν τοὺς ἑαυτῆς δούλους συγκαλοῦσα μετὰ ὑψηλοῦ κηρύγματος ἐπὶ κρατῆρα λέγουσα.’ ἀπέστειλεν τοὺς ἑαυτῆς δούλους; 9:4: ‘Ὅς ἐστὶν ἄφρων, ἐκκλινάτω πρὸς με· καὶ τοῖς ἐνδεέσι φρενῶν εἶπεν; 9:5: ‘Ἔλθατε φάγετε τῶν ἐμῶν ἄρτων καὶ πῖετε οἶνον, ὃν ἐκέρασα ὑμῖν.’

⁹⁴ © Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN / Philippe Fuzeau. For bibliographical information see

From this idea of a vessel used to mix wine Gregory of Nazianzus took the small step for the *kratera* to become a chalice used in the Eucharist,⁹⁵ to hold, mix with water and serve the wine. Water, in the Jewish scriptures symbolises salvation by cleansing as demonstrated in the flood⁹⁶ and rescue from Egypt⁹⁷ and this is taken up in the New Testament with baptism⁹⁸ and the piercing of Jesus' body.⁹⁹ Also there is the connection made between the flow of water and the presence of God in passages when water flowed from the rock¹⁰⁰ and Jesus spoke of living water as an indwelling presence.¹⁰¹ *Psalm* 22 is seen as prophetically pointing to the crucifixion and in this, 'I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint,'¹⁰² there is the picture of God pouring out for the sake of creation. The most significant image of the Christian life portrays the life received because of the sacrifice of Christ and the *kratera* emblematically depicts both the containing of everything and the pouring out for the healing of everything. Emphasis of the requirements for serving the Eucharist are given in writings such as the 63rd *Letter of Cyprian* from about 371 AD, but the language used is Latin and so the cup is referred to

'Euphonius'.

⁹⁵ See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 5, 2.

⁹⁶ *1Pet.* 3:20: '*qui increduli fuerant aliquando quando expectabat Dei patientia in diebus Noe cum fabricaretur arca in qua pauci id est octo animae salvae factae sunt per aquam.*'

⁹⁷ *Exod.* 14:30: '*liberavitque Dominus in die illo Israhel de manu Aegyptiorum.*'

⁹⁸ *Rom.* 6:4: '*consepulti enim sumus cum illo per baptismum in mortem ut quomodo surrexit Christus a mortuis per gloriam Patris ita et nos in novitate vitae ambulemus.*'

⁹⁹ *John* 19:34: '*sed unus militum lancea latus eius aperuit et continuo exivit sanguis et aqua.*'

¹⁰⁰ *Exod.* 17:6: '*en ego stabo coram te ibi super petram Horeb percutiesque petram et exibit ex ea aqua ut bibat populus fecit Moses ita coram senibus Israhel.*' *1Cor.* 10:2-4: '*et omnes in Mose baptizati sunt in nube et in mari, et omnes eandem escam spiritalem manducaverunt, et omnes eundem potum spiritalem biberunt bibebant autem de spiritali consequenti eos petra petra autem erat Christus.*'

¹⁰¹ *John* 4:14: '*sed aqua quam dabo ei fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam.*' *John* 7:38: '*qui credit in me sicut dixit scriptura flumina de ventre eius fluent aquae vivae.*'

¹⁰² *Ps.* 22:14: '*sicut aqua effusus sum et separata sunt omnia ossa.*'

as a *calix*.¹⁰³

This thread was picked up by Pseudo-Dionysius, probably around the 6th century, who begins with the mixing bowl from *Proverbs* and connects this with the actions of God and then God Himself:

Placing a mystical bowl, and pouring forth its sacred drink... Now the bowl being spherical and open, let it be a symbol of the providence over the whole, which at once expands itself and encircles all, without beginning and without end.¹⁰⁴

Dionysius continues to describe the bowl both as unmoved and yet there is a flowing out, an overflow from the bowl. Paradoxically the bowl goes forth yet remains in itself. In advancing out to embrace:

He overtops the whole... never becoming outside himself... and whilst going forth to all, remaining by himself alone... The liquid [in the bowl] is suggestive of the stream at once flowing through and to all.¹⁰⁵

In a typically Dionysian blast of imagery there is the bowl, (*kratera*) and this is the fullness of God, yet the contents of the bowl spill over as God's actions in the world. God is unchanging, in himself, while outpouring himself. Again the link easily stretches to become a Eucharistic picture with the blood of Christ contained and being poured out. God is both the vessel and its contents. God is the entirety and yet the going beyond as well, which is a theme presented by Eckhart using the terms *bullitio* and *ebullitio*.¹⁰⁶

Stoic and Neo-Platonic thought could be seen in the use of *pantokrator* as the one, active and transcendent power in preserving the world, sustaining life and working through the Holy Spirit empowering the Church. God as sovereign was not replaced but refined to include a developing emphasis on his on-going sustaining activity. It is in the developing meaning of the term *pantokrator* that this shift is displayed, although, there are early

¹⁰³ Cyprian, *Epistle* 63, PL 4 (1841-55): 'ut in calice offerendo'.

¹⁰⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Epistle* IX, 3, *Epistle* IX, *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York, 1987).

¹⁰⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Epistle* IX, 3-4, *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, C. Luibheid (1987): 'ἐξήπεται τῶν ὅλων... καὶ οὐδαμῶς ἔξω αὐτοῦ γιγνόμενος... καὶ προϊὼν ἐπὶ πάντα, καὶ μένων ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ... τὴν δὲ ὑγρὰν, τῆς διαχυτικῆς ἅμα καὶ ἐπὶ πάντα προϊέναι σπεθδούσης ἐπιρροῆς.'

¹⁰⁶ See Eckhart, *Sermo* XXV n. 258 (LW IV 236).

Christian authors who share the emphasis with the aspect of dominion, as for example Cyril of Jerusalem (c.313–386 AD) who writes, ‘*Pantokrator* is He who supports all things, who has authority over all things.’¹⁰⁷ In this statement, dominion and preservation are effectively interwoven showing that the Jewish-Stoic shift was prevalent, but not universal.

Church Councils, such as Nicaea in 325 AD and following ones took on the mantle of establishing orthodox doctrine and this was validated by a creed produced to be disseminated for such a purpose. Creeds were often a compilation of small statements of doctrine that could derive from professions of faith, or baptismal questions. The importance to early Christian writers of the attribute of all-mightiness is shown by it being the only divine property to be explicitly referred to in both the ‘Nicene’ and ‘Apostles’ Creeds’.¹⁰⁸ Although the Apostles’ Creed contains elements that could date a couple of centuries earlier, it is first recorded as a creedal statement around 340 AD.¹⁰⁹ The pressing need was not just to present truth but to draw demarcation lines that would expose heresy. It was vital to repudiate Arianism and any other Christological heresies and so a clear proposition of the person of Jesus was increasingly essential. Whereas in Arianism only the Father was *pantokrator* and the Son was one of the powers (*dunamis*) emanating from God, Athanasius, (c.296-73 AD), now proclaimed Jesus also to be *pantokrator*. In a letter to Serapion he stated:

¹⁰⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 8, 3 in: PG 33, 628A: ‘Παντοκράτωρ γάρ ἐστιν ὁ πάντων κράτωρ, ὁ πάντων ἐξουσιάζων’.

¹⁰⁸ See P. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, with a History and Critical notes, 3 vols., CCEL (1876), Apostles: I, 8, 14-23; Nicene: I 24-9. E. Ferguson, ‘Creeds, Councils and Canons’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford, 2008), 427-45; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (1972).

¹⁰⁹ See M. Vinzent, ‘Die Entstehung des römischen Glaubensbekenntnisses’, in: W. Kinzig, C. Marksches and M. Vinzent, *Tauffragen und Bekenntnis. Studien zur sogenannten Traditio Apostolica, zu den Interrogationes de fide und zum Römischen Glaubensbekenntnis*, AzK 74 (1999), 185-410; *id.*, *Der Ursprung des Apostolikums im Urteil der kritischen Forschung*, FKDG 89 (2006).

pantokrator is the Father and *pantokrator* is the Son as John said, that which was and is and is to come, the *pantokrator*.¹¹⁰

Athanasius proclaimed the universal authority and dominion of the Lord Jesus by emphasising the oneness between Father and Son with this turn of phrase, used by the creed attributed to him, which also includes the Holy Spirit. The Athanasian Creed, which is dated probably in the 5th century states, ‘The Father is almighty, Son almighty and Holy Spirit almighty, and yet they are not three almighties but one almighty.’¹¹¹ The immense greatness of God as ‘*pantokrator*’ was therefore fundamental to Christian understanding, but as the Church proceeded, the Old Testament notion of God as supreme power developed to incorporate, or in some cases almost be replaced by the idea that God is also the sustaining power. God is not just the distant sovereign but the one actively exercising his will on the earth. Kelly considers evidence to show *pantokrator* was used to present either sovereign or sustaining power and concludes that sometimes both are inferred. He proposes to combine both strands to form an Early Church definition of *pantokrator* as being, ‘In the first place an active word, conveying the idea not just of capacity but of actualisation of capacity.’¹¹² This is not the thought of distant potency but power in observed activity.

In the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds, ‘*pantokrator*’ appears following the term ‘*pater*’¹¹³ and De Halleux¹¹⁴ emphasises the rarity of this juxtaposition in pre-Nicene literature to

¹¹⁰ Athanasius, *Epistula ad Serapionem*, 2 (PG 26, 609), ‘Παντοκράτωρ ἐστὶν ὁ Πατήρ· παντοκράτωρ ἐστὶ καὶ ὁ Υἱὸς, λέγοντος τοῦ Ἰωάννου· ‘Ὁ ὢν, ὁ ἦν, ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.’ Rev. 1:8: ‘ego sum Alpha et Omega principium et finis dicit Dominus Deus qui est et qui erat et qui venturus est Omnipotens.’

¹¹¹ From the Creed of Athanasius, *Creeds of Christendom*, with a History and Critical notes, vol. II. *The History of Creeds*, IV Symbolum Quicunque, CCEL (1876): ‘*Similiter omnipotens Pater, omnipotens Filius, omnipotens Spiritus Sanctus. Et tamen non tres omnipotentes, sed unus omnipotens.*’

¹¹² J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (1972), 137.

¹¹³ Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds: ‘Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἓνα θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα’, (‘*Credo in Deum patrem potentem*’).

¹¹⁴ De Halleux, Dieu le Père tout-puissant, *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 8 (1977), 401-22. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (1972), 132; D.L. Holland, ‘Pantokrator in New Testament and Creed’, in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Evangelica* 6 (1973), 264.

propose it was not accidental. Kelly argues against taking the two words together but this is refuted by Holland and this raises the question of whether the first term is connoting the second, or the second is connoting the first. If God is the Father who happens to be almighty, then this might lend itself to a Platonic notion of originator. Alternatively, the Almighty who is also Father could infer that the almighty God incorporates a Father/Son relationship. The combination of *pater* and *pantokrator* acknowledges, that for 2nd century Christians, the relationship between God and his creation was inferred by the idea of fatherhood and this was a belief shared with Hellenism and the intellectual Judaism of Philo. However, the increasing need for orthodoxy during the 4th century could have had an impact on the reasoning behind *pater* and *pantokrator* being placed together.

Questionably earlier, but definitely during the 4th century, ‘God as the Father of Jesus’ became the most significant meaning of fatherhood. An example of this emphasis is given when Cyril of Jerusalem stated that,

as soon as one thinks of the Father, one also thinks of the Son.’¹¹⁵

Evidence suggests that focus on the term *pantokrator* had changed because of the more pressing need to consider the implications of the preceding *pater*. In the first two centuries of the Church, writings present the need to relate to the philosophical culture of Stoicism, but in the following centuries, as demand to define Christological doctrine increased, the divine Father to Son relationship became of paramount significance.

The contribution of Augustine

Roman domination presided the early developments of Christianity and consequently writers adopted the prevalent language of the empire. The transfer from Greek to Latin, *pantokrator* to *omnipotens*, activated a theological discussion that continued through to Eckhart and beyond. Whereas *pantokrator* points to the all defeating conqueror and the one holding dominion over, and preserving the world, Latin translators chose to use *omnipotens* which describes the more abstract idea of the almighty power of God. *Omnipotens* reflects the potential to act and the ability to do all things so it is closer in meaning to *pantadunamos* rather than *pantokrator*, and in contrast with *omnitenens* which

¹¹⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 7, 4 (PG 33, 609A; NPNF, Series 2, 8, 45): ‘ἵνα ἅμα τῷ νοεῖν Πατέρα νοήσωμεν καὶ τὸν Υἱοῦ’.

describes the actualisation of capacity. Augustine (354–430 AD)¹¹⁶ broke the term into its components declaring,

but who is omnipotent, then He who can do all things.¹¹⁷

He also highlighted the difference in possible terms by describing God as,

The all-powerful (*omnipotentem*), all-creating (*omnicreantem*) and all-sustaining (*omnitenentem*) maker of heaven and earth.¹¹⁸

It may be that *omnipotens* was the preferred option because that was the term used for Roman gods in their capacity of holding dominion over their subjects and it was important for God to be above all other gods.

With the almightiness of God being framed in terms of the things God can do, it becomes almost inevitable to question if there is anything that God cannot do. Out of the ‘everything’ that could be done, are there certain specific things that God cannot do? The notion that there are things that God could not do was not new, for example, it had been noted towards the end of the 1st century AD Clement of Rome had noted that nothing is impossible with God except to lie.¹¹⁹ Clement was starting from the biblical phrase that, nothing is impossible for God, but then showing how there are exceptions to this rule. Augustine, after presenting the things God can do, began to list the things God cannot do in his advice on the creed to the catechumens:

I can tell you the sort of things He could not do. He cannot die, He cannot sin, He cannot lie, He cannot be deceived. Such things He cannot. If He could, He would not be omnipotent... He does whatsoever He will: that is Omnipotence. He does whatsoever He rightly will, whatsoever He justly will: but whatsoever is evil to do, He wills not.

¹¹⁶ See S. Knuuttila, ‘Time and Creation in Augustine’ in E. Stump and N. Kretzmann (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge, 2001), 107-9.

¹¹⁷ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV 20, 27 (CChr.SL 50, 197): ‘*Quis est autem omnipotens, nisi qui omnia potest.*’ See G. van den Brink, *Almighty God* (1993), 61.

¹¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessiones*, XI 13, 15 (CSEL 33, 290): ‘*te deum omnipotentem et omnicreantem et omnitenentem coeli et terrae artificem*’. See G. van den Brink, *Almighty God* (1993), 60; De Halleux, *Dieu le Père* (Louvain, 1977), 420.

¹¹⁹ 1Clemens 27, 2, trans. K. Lake, *the Apostolic Fathers*, 1 (1975), 55: ‘ὁ παραγγείλας μὴ ψεύεσθαι, πολλῶ μᾶλλον αὐτὸς οὐ ψεύσεται· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀδύνατον παρὰ τῷ θεῷ εἰ μὴ τὸ ψεύσασθαι.’

There is no resisting one who is Almighty, that He should not do what He will.¹²⁰

From this sermon using the text from Paul to Timothy, 'He (God) cannot disown (negate) Himself,'¹²¹ it seems there are numerous things God cannot do, and if he could, then he would not be almighty. All-mightiness does not then mean 'can do everything' because there are certain things the almighty God cannot do. Augustine presented how God does only what it is right for him to do because those are the things that are within his will to do, and in this passage above the omnipotence and will of God are closely linked. Any thought that the will of God is a restriction on his capacity as the omnipotent one is not suggested here.

In what is probably from the same sermon although recorded differently Augustine stated:

If God can be what he does not will to be, He is not omnipotent...
Therefore, God wills whatever he is; He wills to be eternal,
unchangeable, true, beautiful and insuperable.¹²²

The language of being and doing are related in these words again with willing to show that God acts according to not only who he is, but what he wants to do, and so does not do what is not right for him, being God, not to do. For example, God could not be unwise because he is wisdom, or false because he is true to himself. Doing any action not within his will would mean God doing something he does not wish to do which is incompatible with being all-powerful. There is no reference to the idea of a power distinction and the

¹²⁰ Augustine, *Sermo de symbolo ad catechumenos* 2 (CChr.SL 46, 185-6, PL 40, 627), trans. H. Browne, NPNF (1887): '*Quam multa non potest, et omnipotens est: et ideo omnipotens est, quia ista non potest ... Nam ego dico quanta non possit. Non potest mori, non potest peccare, non potest mentiri, non potest falli. Tanta non potest: quae si posset, non esset omnipotens ... Facit quidquid vult: ipsa est omnipotentia. Facit quidquid bene vult, quidquid juste vult: quidquid autem male fit, non vult. Nemo resistit omnipotenti, ut non quod vult faciat.*'

¹²¹ 2Tim. 2:13: '*si non credimus ille fidelis manet negare se ipsum non potest.*' See Titus 2:1, '*in spem vitae aeternae quam promisit qui non mentitur Deus ante tempora saecularia.*'

¹²² Augustine, *Sermo* CCXIV (PL 38, 1068): '*Si ergo potest esse quod non vult, omnipotens non est ... Volens enim est deus quidquid est; aeternus ergo et incommutabilis, et verax, et beatus, et insuperabilis volens est.*' Trans. van den Brink (1993).

emphasis is simply that God acts according to his omnipotent nature and so is able to do everything that he wills to do. However, the notions that God acts according to his nature and his will became fundamental to the future debate over the omnipotence of God.

The question of omnipotence surfaced when Augustine dealt with the thoughts of Pelagius in his work, *Of Nature and Grace*, written in 415 AD. He wrote several pieces against Pelagius from 412 AD onwards, though on this occasion never mentioned Pelagius by name or the 'Pelagians', in his measured desire to correct heretical ideas without fuelling division. Augustine presents the distinction between what might be and what is, saying:

For he (Pelagius) first of all makes a distinction: 'It is one thing (says he) to inquire whether a thing can be, which has respect to its possibility only; and another thing, whether or not it is.' This distinction, nobody doubts, is true enough; for it follows that whatever is, was able to be; but it does not therefore follow that what is able to be, also is. Our Lord, for instance, raised Lazarus; (*John* 11:1-44) He unquestionably was able to do so. But inasmuch as He did not raise up Judas must we therefore contend that He was unable to do so? He certainly was able, but He would not. For if He had been willing, He could have effected this too. 'For the Son gives life to whom He will.' (*John* 5:21)¹²³

Augustine explained how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and so could have raised Judas by the same power but chose not to. By mentioning what can be, Augustine is referring to all that is possible and all that is possible for God to do. A distinction is highlighted with the case of Judas, as the difference between the things that could be, and the things that in fact are. This distinction, between everything possible, and everything

¹²³ Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*, 8 (PL 44, 250-1; CSEL 60, 237), trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, and revised by Benjamin B. Warfield, in Philip Schaff (ed.), NPNF, First Series, vol. 5 (1887): '*Nam prius distinguit: aliud esse quaerere an possit aliquid esse, quod ad solam possibilitatem pertinet, aliud, utrumne sit. Hanc distinctionem veram esse nemo ambigit; consequens enim est, ut quod est esse potuerit, non est autem consequens, ut quod esse potest etiam sit. Quia enim Dominus Lazarum suscitavit, sine dubio potuit; quia vero Iudam non suscitavit, numquid dicendum est: Non potuit? Potuit ergo, sed noluit. Nam si voluisset, eadam etiam hoc potestate fecisset, quia, "et Filius quos vult vivificat."*'

God actually does, features all the way through to *Question six* of Eckhart. Augustine uses this incident which involves God making a choice, given by the phrase, ‘He would not’, to introduce his fundamental concept of the will. God did not choose to raise Lazarus out of neglect for Judas, nor by necessity, nor out of ontological conditioning, for example, because him being good, he can only and solely do good things, but not raise a traitor. Jesus could only raise Lazarus, but not Judas instead, because this was God’s choice, as emphasised by using the words of Jesus declaring that God only ‘gives life to whom he will.’¹²⁴ This so-called choice makes this giving of life an act of wilful decision making by God. On this foundation of God’s will, the ‘all-good’ God’s actions are not necessarily always immediately perceivable as good. On the contrary, in his work, *On the Trinity* Augustine spoke of the power of God to deliver a means of salvation, but the manner that God chose, was by the death of Christ Jesus. So, while the death of his own Son, in its perpetration was a permitted act of evil under the sovereign will of God, it was essentially the most powerful demonstration of the fullness of his love. He writes to those who question if

God had no other way by which He might free men from the misery of this mortality, that He should will the only-begotten Son, God co-eternal with Himself, to become man, by putting on a human soul and flesh, and being made mortal to endure death?... For what was so necessary for the building up of our hope, and for the freeing the minds of mortals cast down by the condition of mortality itself, from despair of immortality, than that it should be demonstrated to us at how great a price God rated us, and how greatly He loved us.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ John 5:21, ‘*sicut enim Pater suscitavit mortuos et vivificat sic et Filius quos vult vivificat.*’

¹²⁵ Augustine *De Trinitate*, 13, 10 (PL 42, 1024), trans. Arthur West Haddan, in Philip Schaff (ed.), NPNF, First Series, vol. 3 (1887): ‘*Itane defuit deo modus alius quo liberaret homines a miseria mortalitatis huius ut unigenitum filium deum sibi coaeternum hominem fieri uellet induendo humanam animam et carnem mortalemque factum mortem perpeti?*’ ... *parum est sic refellere ut istum modum quo nos per mediatorem dei et hominum hominem Christum Iesum Deus liberare dignatur asseramus bonum et diuinae congruum dignitati; uerum etiam ut ostendamus non alium modum possibilem deo defuisse cuius*

There is no disparity between what is good for man and the will of God. The passion of Christ occurred because it was permitted by God, and this was because it was ordained by God as the only way to redeem fallen man. As Augustine says in the passage above there neither was, nor needs to have been any other mode more appropriate for curing our misery. The brutal crucifixion of Jesus was first of all an act of love, and this was the choice of God, made within the will of God, and therefore revealing the nature of God. What was perceived as desperate weakness was in fact the ultimate demonstration of divine power.

The problem of evil in the first place is also dealt with as an issue that considers God's omnipotence alongside his will. Augustine uses the account of creation in Genesis to present his view that the sin of Adam instigated the entrance of sin to the human race and hence the need for Christ's act of redemption. Augustine reflected on the thought that God in his goodness could have prevented the entrance of evil, writing:

Whence is evil? Or was there some evil matter of which He made and formed and ordered it, but left something in it which He did not convert into good? But why was this? Was He powerless to change the whole lump, so that no evil should remain in it, seeing that He is omnipotent? Lastly, why would He make anything at all of it, and not rather by the same omnipotency cause it not to be at all? Or could it indeed exist contrary to His will? ... Or if He wished now all of a sudden to do something, this rather should the Omnipotent have accomplished, that this evil matter should not be at all.¹²⁶

potestati cuncta aequaliter subiacent, sed sanandae nostrae miseriae convenientiorem modum alium non fuisse nec esse oportuisse.'

¹²⁶ Augustine, *Confessiones*, 7, 5, trans. J.G. Pilkington, in Philip Schaff (ed.), NPNF, First Series, vol. 1 (1887): '*unde est malum? an unde fecit ea, materies aliqua mala erat, et formavit atque ordinavit eam, sed reliquit aliquid in illa, quod in bonum non converteret? cur et hoc? an inpotens erat totam vertere et conmutare, ut nihil mali remaneret, cum sit omnipotens? postremo cur inde aliquid facere voluit, ac non potius eadem omnipotentia fecit, ut nulla esset omnino? aut vero existere poterat contra eius voluntatem? aut si non erat bene, ut non aliquid boni etiam fabricaretur et conderet qui bonus erat, illa sublata et ad nihilum redacta materie, quae mala erat, bonam ipse institueret, unde omnia crearet?*'

Augustine asks why God, who is good, would create something that became evil if he is omnipotent. The question touches at the core of what Christian thinking and western philosophy had built as an intellectual framework over centuries, especially in response to the problem of evil. Without providing a clinical answer in this text, he points out that the fall and God's act of sacrificial love could not have happened contrary to God's will. It might have seemed in keeping with the goodness of God to prevent sin from happening, or at least banish it before it took any foothold, but God must have permitted this entrance of sin although its ruinous effects would pervade all creation. Augustine states that there was no necessity to make anything bad, and he had the power to destroy it at any stage. However, because God is all-powerful, he is able to do as he wills and so it must have been within God's will to allow evil to enter the world. The distinction between what God could possibly do out of power and what he is able to do out of will is seen in that God had the power to prevent evil but chose not to.

God has permitted evil in the world but this is balanced by the effects of justice and Augustine distinguishes between what God could do because of his power (*potentia*), but would not do out of justice (*iustitia*).¹²⁷ It is therefore within this permissive will of God that evil exists and so even this is good in that it reveals the omnipotence of God who has enough power to do anything that is real, including to permit sin. The choices made by God are within his will which is governed by his nature incorporating not just love but justice. This is why Job, Paul and Peter were refined to be saved but,

Judas was damned so that he should hang himself.¹²⁸ When, therefore, through the power which He has given the Devil, God Himself shall have done all things righteously, nevertheless punishment shall at last be rendered to the Devil not for these things justly done, but for the unrighteous willing to be hurtful, which belonged to himself, when it shall be said to the impious who persevered in consenting to his wickedness, 'Go ye into everlasting fire which my God has prepared for the Devil and his angels.'¹²⁹

¹²⁷ See Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium Donatistarum Episcopum*, Book 1, 30, 35 (PL 43, 727; CSEL 53, 233).

¹²⁸ *Matt. 27:5: 'et proiecitis argenteis in templo recessit et abiens laqueo se suspendit.'*

¹²⁹ *Matt. 25:41: 'tunc dicet et his qui a sinistris erunt discedite a me maledicti in ignem aeternum qui paratus est diabolo et angelis eius.'* Augustine, *On the nature of Good:*

God could have prevented evil or saved Judas but did not do so, not because he was not able, but because of choice. This is ‘absolute power’ but with ‘self-imposed limitation’. To illustrate this Augustine refers to the account of the dialogue between Lot and the angel as Lot and his family were fleeing Sodom. The angel, acting on behalf of God, said that he would wait until Lot and his family arrived in Zoar before destroying Sodom because, ‘I can do nothing until you arrive there.’¹³⁰ Clearly, as God was about to rain down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah he could do so at the time of his choosing, but in the narrative God would wait, mercifully, for Lot and family to complete their actions of scrambling to Zoar. While this passage includes the element of God making himself subject to man, the sovereignty of God is even more strikingly emphasised by the way Lot's wife disobeyed the instruction not to look back and received the due punishment of being turned into a pillar of salt. This fatal sting in the tail for Lot's wife is maybe a reminder that although God chooses to impose restrictions on himself, he is still able to exercise justice as well as mercy.

Augustine presents how what God chooses to permit effects creation and thereby alludes to ideas of predestination and election that were picked up by the reformed theology of Calvin in the 16th century. He wrote books entitled ‘*On Free Will*’ and ‘*On the predestination of the Saints*’ and by taking isolated pieces of text it could be claimed Augustine maybe changed his mind or at least modified his thinking. God's saving action towards Job, Peter, Paul and Lazarus contrasts with the damnation of Judas and these actions may have been predestined to happen such that God had effected their lives without any freedom of choice. Alternatively, the men acted out of choice and, out of justice, they were predestined to receive what God had willed accorded to his justice. In this case God's actions follow his foreknowledge rather than his will being fatalistically executed by puppet-like men. Augustine stated:

Against the Manichaeans, 32, CSEL 25, 871, ‘*Iudas damnatus ut se suspenderet. Cum ergo per potestatem quam diabolo dedit, omnia iuste ipse Deus fecerit; non tamen pro his iuste factis sed pro iniqua nocendi voluntate, quae ipsius diaboli fuit, ei reddetur in fine supplicium, cum dicetur impiis qui eius nequitiae consentire perseveraverint: Ite in ignem aeternum quem paravit Pater meus diabolo et angelis eius.*’

¹³⁰ Gen. 19:22: ‘*festina et salvare ibi quia non potero facere quicquam donec ingrediaris illuc idcirco vocatum est nomen urbis illius Segor.*’ See Gen. 18-23.

Wherefore, God would have been willing to preserve even the first man in that state of salvation in which he was created, and after he had begotten sons to remove him at a fit time, without the intervention of death, to a better place, where he should have been not only free from sin, but free even from the desire of sinning, if He had foreseen that man would have the steadfast will to persist in the state of innocence in which he was created. But as He foresaw that man would make a bad use of his free-will, that is, would sin, God arranged His own designs rather with a view to do good to man even in his sinfulness, that thus the good will of the Omnipotent might not be made void by the evil will of man, but might be fulfilled in spite of it.¹³¹

It is not that God is not able to do all the things that we might perceive as good, such as prevent sin and save the life of everyone, but that God's will be in line with his plans and it is these plans that happen because God has sovereign power. The notion that it does not conflict with God's omnipotence to allow evil and it is indeed good that evil exists is presented a few chapters earlier by Augustine and incorporated by Eckhart into his treatment on omnipotence in *Question six*.¹³² Augustine could reconcile God's omnipotence with man's freedom by this view that God has allowed bad things to happen but predestined events such that his will is not compromised. The power of God is revealed through the actions of man, who in his freedom of choice from his human perspective, has been fulfilling the will of God.

¹³¹ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, c. XXVIII, n. 104, trans. J.F. Shaw in Philip Schaff (ed.), NPNF, vol. 3 (1887), ch. 104, '*Quapropter etiam primum hominem Deus in ea salute in qua conditus erat custodire voluisset, eumque opportuno tempore post genitos filios sine interpositione mortis ad meliora perducere, ubi iam non solum peccatum committere sed nec voluntatem posset habere peccandi, si ad permanendum sine peccato, sicut factus erat, perpetuam voluntatem habiturum esse praescisset. Quia vero eum male usurum libero arbitrio, hoc est peccaturum esse, praesciebat, ad hoc potius praeparavit voluntatem suam ut bene ipse faceret etiam de male faciente, ac sic hominis voluntate mala non evacuetur sed nihilo minus impleretur omnipotentis bona.*'

¹³² See Augustine, *Enchiridion*, c. XXIV, n. 96 (CChr.SL 46, 100, 40-1): '*Neque enim ob aliud veraciter vocatur omnipotens nisi quoniam quidquid vult potest.*'

The omnipotence debate had been opened and now the distinction exposed between what God is able to do in theory and what he actually does in practice because of his will. Augustine proposed that there are things that God cannot do because of a self-imposed limitation in accordance with his will. The decisions made about the action to take, such as who to save, are based on God's love and justice, and are the choices that reveal God's nature through his power. The almighty nature of God had not changed but focus on the concept of all-mightiness now included the things that God could not do, because it was not within his will to do them.

The 'Fallen Virgin'

If Augustine delivered fuel for the mediaeval debate on the power distinction, the unmistakeable catalyst used to spark the flames was provided by his distinguished Latin Church contemporary, Jerome. Both were saddened and anxious about events in Rome.¹³³ Augustine, from Hippo, expressed his consolation to the victims of rape in 410 AD, when the Goths were ruthlessly ravaging a capital of a far-reaching empire which once was praised for its invincible walls and eternal destiny. Jerome wrote at that time from Bethlehem to offer sympathy, however, it was an earlier letter of 384 AD, to Julia Eustochium in Rome, extolling her devotion to virginity in the promiscuous and declining city, that was behind the mediaeval stir.

From God's word through Amos describing the plight of 'fallen virgin Israel', Jerome gave a warning that the good can go astray but God would rescue those who seek him.¹³⁴ With the exhortation for Eustochium to persevere came this thought on God's action:

I will say it boldly, though God can do all things He cannot raise up a virgin when once she has fallen. He may indeed free her from the penalty of her sin, but He will not crown the corrupted.¹³⁵

¹³³ See F. Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order* (1984), 41-2 summarising Jerome, *Ezechielem prophetam*, Lib. 1; in PL 25:15-6, Augustine, *De civitate dei*, I, c. 16-9, 28 (CChr.SL 47:17-22, 28-30).

¹³⁴ Amos 5:2: '*Virgo Israhel proiecta est in terram suam non est qui suscitetur eam.*'

¹³⁵ Jerome, *Epistula* 22, 5 (CSEL 54, 150): '*Audenter loquor: Cum omnia Deus possit, suscitare virginem non potest post ruinam. Valet quidem liberare de poena, sed non vult coronare corruptam.*'

By saying that this was to be a bold statement, Jerome was aware that he was about to make his point in a controversial manner. The message to Eustochium was more to express sadness at the devastating loss, with an admonishment to hold on to her virginal vow in such troubled times, rather than what the power of God can or can't do. However, by using the word *vult*, a platform was created to discuss the idea that what God actually does is connected with what he is willing to do and it was this quote by Jerome that triggered the debate in mediaeval times between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*. Reports record a dining encounter at the abbey of Monte Cassino in Southern Italy around 1066 AD, between the abbot of the monastery, Desiderius, and his friend and fellow cardinal, Peter Damian, (1007–1072 AD).¹³⁶ The meal would have been held in silence apart from a reading by a monk from a spiritual book, and it could be that the letter from Jerome was the reading on this occasion. Contemporary treatment of the issue was focussing on the things God could not do and Courtenay frames a question from Damian such that, 'in light of the Christian affirmation of divine omnipotence expressed in the opening line of the creed, how should one understand an authoritative statement of scripture or of one of the fathers that seems to speak about things God cannot do.'¹³⁷ Whereas Desiderius had no problem with the view that God could only do what was within his will, Damian was perturbed by Jerome's issue of the fallen virgin and later admitted that he wrote not

in order to disparage the blessed Jerome, who spoke with pious devotion, but to confute by the invincible reasoning of the faith those

¹³⁶ For recent discussion on this meeting see J. Yolles, 'Divine Omnipotence and the Liberal Arts in Peter Damain and Peter Abelard' in *Rethinking Abelard* (Leiden, 2014), 60-83. See also H.E.J. Cowdrey, *The Age of Abbot Desiderius* (Oxford, 1983).

¹³⁷ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 25. Courtenay dates the events at Monte Cassino as occurring in 1066 AD and Cantin suggests the letter would be read at the vigil on the feast of St Jerome Day in 1066, although Oakley suggests 1067 and Yolles 1065. See Peter Damian, *Disputatio* cap. 5, in *Pierre Damien: Lettre sur la toute-puissance divine*, in André Cantin (ed.), SC 191 (Paris, 1972), 31-2; Peter Damien "Epistulae" in K. Reindel (ed.), *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani* (Munich, 1983-93), 3, *Epistula* 119, 354.

who made of his words an occasion for imputing a lack of power to God.¹³⁸

Damian, was concerned that the idea of God doing *whatever* he wills could become God could do *only* what he wills and therefore not do anything he does not do. In his treatise, *De divina omnipotentia* Damian maintained that God had indeed infinite capacities and could do things, even if he did not wish to do them. The contrary would, indeed, entail that ‘all the things God is *not* doing on a particular day, such as bringing rain, curing the feeble, opposing the unjust, or protecting the just, would lie outside the power of God.’¹³⁹ This does however suggest that God has some un-deployed capacity and therefore raises the question, ‘Why God did not do more of what appeared good from a human perspective?’¹⁴⁰

Courtenay suggests that, ‘in his discussion of the things God supposedly could not do (*non posse*), Damian saw a parallel between those things God does not will (*nolle*) and those things God does not know (*nescire*). Certain things, namely things that are evil or inappropriate for God, do not come into the mind of God, even before willing or acting, such as to lie, perjure or act unjustly. But for God to be said not to be able to do or know anything evil, such statements do not refer to impossibility or ignorance but to the rectitude of his unchanging will.’¹⁴¹

This was a development from the thoughts of Boethius, who in his fourth book, *Of the Consolation of Philosophy*, explained why,

¹³⁸ Peter Damien, *Disputatio*, cap. 5, in A. Cantin (ed.), *Lettre* (1972), 406, trans. F. Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order* (1984), 43: ‘*Haec autem dixi, non ut B Hieronymo, qui pio studio locutus est, detrahā; sed ut eos illius occasione Deum astruunt impotentem, invicta fidei ratione refellam.*’ Also (a different version) to be found in *Opusculum* 36, *De Divina Omnipotentia in Repartitione Corruptae* (PL 145, cap. 3, 619).

¹³⁹ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 26 summarising Peter Damian, *Disputatio* (PL 145, 597AB; SC 191, 388-90), see here and following, this and other Latin texts referenced and included in appendix ii, listed according to their corresponding footnote in main text. See also PL 145, 610.

¹⁴⁰ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 27.

¹⁴¹ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 26; see Peter Damian, *Disputatio*, (PL 145, 598D-599A; SC 191, 396), see appendix ii.

Supreme goodness cannot do evil.¹⁴²

Accordingly, the reason why God is more limited in his actions, compared with human beings, has to do with the categorical understanding of limit. As evil has no being and is nothing, God's inability to do nothing is only a circumscription of him being omnipotent, or conversely, omnipotence 'is defined as power to do the good, not the power to do anything', and especially not idleness to do nothing.¹⁴³ The fact that God cannot do some things is therefore not a case of un-deployed capacity, because doing the wrong things are not within God's nature and knowledge. This is because to be able to do something that is evil, is to be able to do something that *is not*, and so would in fact be a challenge to God's omnipotence, not be a necessary part of it. Evil has no being, and is not a 'something', therefore it is not a 'something' that he cannot do. If it were part of the definition of omnipotence, it would be to introduce privation or absence, and so undermine omnipotence.

Damian proposed that restoring the purity of the fallen virgin was possible because God knows only of good and this would be an act of good, and so because he knows of it, he could do it. God is able to effect, and go beyond, what we see as the laws of nature as he did when he delivered the three friends of Daniel from the fiery furnace.¹⁴⁴ Therefore God could restore a virgin's moral and legal status, and, through a miracle, even her body, because he is able to 'arrange things such that an undesirable past event never happened,

¹⁴² see Boethius, *De consolation philosophiae* IV, prosa 2 (CSEL 67, 84; CChr.SL 94, 69): '*Summo bono nihil potentius esse Paulo ante definivimus... Sed idem, inquit, facere malum nequit.*' Trans. here and following W.J. Courtenay, (1990), 30. Boethius, 'Last of the Romans, first of the scholastics', wrote his *Consolation* while awaiting execution in prison c.525 AD, lamenting his premature old age, see H. Chadwick, *Boethius* (Oxford, 1981), 1; N.H. Kaylor, Jr., introduction: The Times, Life and Work of Boethius in 'A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages', in C. M. Bellitto (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition*, 30 (Leiden and Boston, 2012), 1-46.

¹⁴³ Boethius, *De consolation philosophiae* IV, prosa 2 (CSEL 67, 84; CChr.SL 94,69): '*cum igitur bonorum tantummodo potens possit omnia, non vero queant omnia potentes etiam malorem, eosdemqui mala possunt, minus posse manifestum est.*'

¹⁴⁴ See *Dan.* 3:19-27.

that is, change the content of the past.’¹⁴⁵ These thoughts of Damian exploring the notion of the omnipotence of God, stray not too far from Augustine’s required constraint of the will of God, and also present the contrast between God as creator and his creation:

For he who has given birth to nature easily removes the necessity of nature when he wills.¹⁴⁶

This reflects his eagerness to propose a notion of unlimited omnipotence, and so connects all the way back to the Hebrew concept of power, while presenting the idea that God is able to make choices and thereby pointing forward to the debate rooted in a theoretical power distinction.

Early Scholastic treatment

Peter Damian did not want God to be restricted by his own will but this proposal that God has the capacity to alter the past was rejected by Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033–1109 AD), who maintained that God could not make true what is false or make false what is true. In his thoughts on omnipotence in *Proslogion* Anselm lines up alongside Desiderius in proposing God’s power is as extensive as his will, however there is the qualifier that the ability to do evil is not ability, but the inability to do good. For example, the idea that something cannot be done, such as that God cannot lie, should be taken as a confirmation not denial of ability.¹⁴⁷ Later, in *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm modified his view by acknowledging that God, in Christ, did have the capacity to sin otherwise he would not have been human. However, Christ did not have the will to sin, and more than that, he did not have the ability to will to sin. Anselm shows how God acts out of necessity, in that his actions are determined by his own choice to give himself to man by grace. God, having

¹⁴⁵ Peter Damian, *Disputatio* (PL 145, 601C-620C; SC 191, 448), *Ibid.*, 474-6, see appendix ii, trans. W.J. Courtenay, (1990), 26.

¹⁴⁶ Peter Damian, *De Divina Omnipotentia*, PL 145, col. 612A-B, trans. Toivo J. Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology in the 11th Century* (1996), 7: ‘*Qui enim naturae dedit originem, facile, cum vult, naturae tollit necessitatem.*’

¹⁴⁷ See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 43., see ‘Necessity and Freedom in Anselm’s conception of God’ in *Covenant and Causality in Medieval Thought* (London, 1984), 39-64; Anselm, *Proslogion* 7 in: *Opera Omnia*, (ed.) F.S. Schmitt (1946-1961), I, 105.

made a covenant with man, has promised to act in a way that fulfils his obligation. This promise was freely made and it is freely kept although this is a choice of self-limitation. God does not have the power to contradict his own nature and so he cannot make false what is true and change the past, but his actions deal with the past for our good. Leftow presents Anselm's struggle with the thought that impossibility suggests powerlessness and necessity suggests compulsion, and concludes this idea means that God acts necessarily because of his own promises and so has bound himself to act in certain ways. Therefore, for Anselm, while the possibility for God to do other than he does remains open, what he actually does is bound by the self-imposed restriction of his will.¹⁴⁸

Clearly God acts according to his will and nature, or he wouldn't be God, but this implies limitations because, for instance, he cannot do bad things or be lazy, and so omnipotence is refined as the power to do some things but not anything. With Anselm following the line of Augustine such that all of God's actions are encompassed by his will, Peter Abelard (1079–1142 AD)¹⁴⁹ was concerned that this self-imposed restriction on his actions could be seen to diminish God's omnipotence. The notion that God only does what is befitting for God to do is added to by what might seem a logical conclusion that because these things are the only things God does and it would be unbecoming to do anything else, then there is the question of whether God holds this unusable power. In essence Abelard was asking such questions as, 'Could God do anything other than he is doing? Could he discontinue what he is doing? Could he do better than he is doing? If God can only do what he does, then what about the good things he chooses not to do?' The idea that the things God can do is restricted to the things he does, led Abelard to conclude that,

¹⁴⁸ See B. Leftow, 'Anselm's perfect-being theology' in B. Davies and B. Leftow (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge, 2004), 150-1. See Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* II, (Opera Omnia II, 100), trans. E.R. Fairweather in W.J. Courtenay (1990), 34-5, see appendix ii. See also Anselm, *Philosophica Fragmentum*, Exordium, in J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (eds), *Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. II (New York, 1976).

¹⁴⁹ See J. Yolles, Divine Omnipotence and the Liberal Arts in Peter Damian and Peter Abelard in *Rethinking Abelard* (Leiden, 2014), 60-83; M. Perkams, Divine Omnipotence and Moral Theory in Abelard's Theology, *Mediaeval Studies* 65 (2003), 99-116; W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 44-54.

‘God cannot do anything but what he does, neither forgive what he forgives.’¹⁵⁰

Similarly strict was his definition that became known as the principle, *Opinio Nominalium*, proposing that whatever God at one time knew, willed, or was able to do, he always knows, wills, or is able to do which was later reduced to the axiom: once it is true, it is always true (*semel est verum, semper est verum*).¹⁵¹ If there was a time when God could not do something he has done before, then that would be a lack of power and inconsistency in the unchanging God. The knowledge of God like his power could not change with time. Hence, ‘God cannot only do *whatever* he wills; he can do *only* what he wills. There is no sphere of un-deployed capacity, no process of divine deliberation in which choices are made from a larger range of possibilities. Consequently, it is meaningless in light of the simplicity and atemporality of God to speculate about whether God has the power to act in ways other than he does, or to have acted otherwise.’¹⁵²

For Abelard, any description of God’s actions reflects the constraints known to humans, and although these do not effect God’s ability to act, from this human perspective, the actions of God are contained within his will. Abelard acknowledged using Platonic ideas to present a ‘necessitarianistic’ world in which all genuine possibility is actualised.¹⁵³ Everything that happens is what was necessarily going to happen and so God is in control and his all-powerfulness remains safeguarded, however, in attempting to extend the potential of God to act, Abelard effectively ‘boxed himself into a corner’¹⁵⁴ and installed a limit on the actions of God.

Damian’s idea that God could change the past was dealt with, but not without suggesting that divine activity is restricted by time. Containing what God is able to do in this way

¹⁵⁰ Abelard, as reported by Odo of Soissons, *Quaestiones*, Pt. II, n. 298: ‘*Deus non potest facere nisi quod facit, nec dimittere nisi quod dimittit*’, trans. W.J. Courtenay, (1990), 44.

¹⁵¹ Abelard, *Ad Theologiam ‘scholarium’* III, c. 5 (PL 178, 1103; CCCM 13, 526), see appendix ii, summarised by W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 46.

¹⁵² W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 50, summarising Abelard, *Theologia Christiana* V (PL 178, 1324). See also (PL 178, 1329-30; CCCM 12, 366,

¹⁵³ See A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (New York, 1960), 70-3.

¹⁵⁴ A turn of phrase used in the translation of Lombard’s *Sentences*, L.1, d. 44, c. 1, (188): ‘*Quaestio qua illi arctantur.*’ English translation, *The Sentences*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto, 2007-10), 238.

could be construed as seeming to place limitations on God, as well as proposing there are things that humans can do that God cannot do. This apparent restraining of God was countered by Hugh of St. Victor who argued that,

divine providence and foreknowledge do not preclude an indeterminate future, since any changes which remain possible, would have been foreseen and foreordained by God.¹⁵⁵

And, in dealing with the issue if God could do better, Hugh proposed that God could not do better than he does, not because of a lack of power but that he does not have the will to do so.¹⁵⁶ For Hugh, exercising his will is not a restriction for God who has done everything in the best way possible, and this is not different from his will. The distinction is made between capacity and volition although any difference does not exist in practice. Hugh modified Abelard with the suggestion that God did have the power to do differently, but Abelard's idea that God is not able to do other than he does met with more serious opposition when William of St. Thierry wrote to Bernard of Clairvaux and Geoffrey, Bishop of Chartres, in 1136 AD suggesting Abelard's teaching should be declared heretical. As the dispute gathered momentum, in 1140 AD, 'what was to have been a debate at Sens between Bernard and Abelard quickly turned into a trial, presided over by the papal legate Conon and attended by Louis VII and most of the French bishops. Among the nineteen propositions submitted by Bernard for condemnation was one that God is able to do only what he does, or not do what he only does not do, in no other way and at no other time.'¹⁵⁷ To Bernard, Abelard was proposing that if God's power is fully actualised in doing the good he does, then he would lack the power to do better. Although Abelard's views were condemned in 1140 AD for the second time following an initial appeal, his intellectual approach bridged the gap between the cloister and the university and, according to Gilson, 'Abelard's influence was momentous... the illustrious disciples

¹⁵⁵ Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis*, I, 2, 22 (PL 176, 215), see appendix ii. summarised by W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 50. For background on Hugh see P. Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor* (Oxford, 2009).

¹⁵⁶ See Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis*, I, 2, 22 (PL 176, 216): '*Ergo ipse melior esse non potest. Sed quod fecit omne melius esse potest, si tamen voluerit qui potest.*' Also P.S. Dillard, *Foundation and Restoration in Hugh of St Victor's De sacramentis* (New York, 2014), 191.

¹⁵⁷ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 52.

who took up and continued his work witness to the fecundity of the new spirit he had brought to it.’¹⁵⁸ Specifically, rather than provide an acceptable solution, he stirred others to realise there was a need to elucidate the power distinction, and Abelard is often more generally credited with paving the way towards raising scholastic standards rather than achieving them himself.

Among those influenced by Abelard was Peter Lombard (1095–1160 AD),¹⁵⁹ whose famous *Libri Sententiarum* became the text book for the following decades and indeed centuries.¹⁶⁰ Book 1 of these *Sentences* contains a section of distinctions which pick up the threads of the power distinction. In *distinction 42* Lombard rhetorically asks, ‘Why, is God called Omnipotent?’¹⁶¹ In his response, Lombard recalls the sermon of Augustine to the catechumens which acknowledged that, while God can certainly do all things, he only does those which are in accordance with his truth and justice. He does what is reasonable for him to do. God can only act in consistency with his nature. His power reveals who he is. And so there must be things that God cannot do. The fact that God cannot sin is not due to a lack of power. It is an act of power not to sin and God is not subject to the failings of man. God cannot lose, his power is more than any power imaginable. As Lombard explains, God does not walk or do human things because he does not possess the human organs needed to do them... but he has empowered man to do them, so he has the power to walk, otherwise he could not bestow it. Lombard states:

God is powerful from himself and through himself; but a man or angel,
however blessed, is not powerful from himself and through himself.¹⁶²

Omnipotence, according to Lombard, is defined as self-empowering capacity. Men or angels can be powerful, but they do not have power within themselves and are created

¹⁵⁸ E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (1955), 163.

¹⁵⁹ See I. Brady, ‘Peter Lombard: Canon of Notre Dame’, *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 32 (1965), 277-95; M.L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden, 1994).

¹⁶⁰ See I. Boh, ‘Divine Omnipotence in the Early sentences’ in T. Rudavsky (ed.), *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, Synthese Historical Library vol. 25 (New York, 1984), 185-211.

¹⁶¹ Lombard, I *Sent.*, d. 42, c. 1 (184): ‘*De omnipotentia Dei: quare dicatur omnipotens.*’ Trans. here and following G. Silano (2007-10).

¹⁶² Lombard, I *Sent.*, d. 42, c. 3, 4 (186): ‘*Et Deus quidem ex se, et per se potest; homo autem vel angelus, quantum que beatus est, non est potens ex se vel per se.*’

with certain powers. God, however, is omnipotent from and through himself. This power needs to conform to his nature, and restrictions, like those mentioned by Augustine before, come with his nature and, as Augustine developed, his will, and are not limitations on his capacity, and nothing that should be done is left unaccomplished. Doing any action not within his will, would mean God doing something he therefore would not wish to do, which is incompatible with being all-powerful. And so, because God is all-powerful, his will is done, as Lombard emphasised:

If he willed it, it would be done, because nothing can resist his will.¹⁶³

God can do whatever he wills through himself or through a creature and so because God is almighty, God's will is done... nothing can resist it. God is called omnipotent because he can do whatever he wills.

The question of whether God's capacity to act exceeds the actions determined by his will is set out in *distinction* 43:

Some say [and he certainly thinks of Abelard] that God is able to do nothing other than what he does. Nor could he do better or omit anything.¹⁶⁴

Of concern is the issue that led to the trial and condemnation of Abelard. It does not fit comfortably within the scope of omnipotence for there to be anything that could not be done. Lombard rejected Abelard's Platonic view of divine power being fully actualised and stressed that if there is anything that God cannot do, it is not due to a lack of power but a matter of choice, stating,

God can leave undone whatever he chooses. He is able to do many things he does not will to do, and is able not to do what he does.¹⁶⁵

He explains that, neither God's power nor His will change, whether he does things or not. For instance, Jesus could have called for more support in Gethsemane but this was not the way the scriptures had prophesied things would happen. He also recalls the incident, often referred to in the power debate, when the angel explained that God's wrath on

¹⁶³ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 42, c. 3, 6 (186): '*Si enim vellet, fieret, quia voluntati eius nihil resistere possit.*'

¹⁶⁴ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 43, c. 1, 1 (187): '*Aiunt enim: Non potest Deus aliud facere quam facit, nec melius facere id quod facit, nec aliquid praetermittere de his quae facit.*'

¹⁶⁵ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 43, c. 1, 8 (187): '*Fateamur itaque Deum plura posse facere quae non vult et posse dimittere quae facit.*'

Sodom had to wait until Lot had arrived in Zoar.¹⁶⁶ God had done the deal with Abraham and so any delay was a matter of justice rather than any lack of power. God can only do what he *ought*, and yet the idea of *ought* is a human perspective that Lombard describes as poisonous.¹⁶⁷ As people, we must think about what we *ought* to do, but to God, choice is automatic because of who he is. Lombard explains, this is not questioning what God *ought* to do, such that there could be something he does not do, that he should do. Rather the questioning implied by asking, *what if...* God were to do something is not about power but suitability. As humans, we are in no position to question what God *ought* to do, but if we could see from God's perspective, neither does he, and so if God leaves something undone, he does so for a reason. It is not a question of concern for ability, or number, or the nature of items willed. There are many things done and many undone but this is a reflection of choice, not the extent of power. Lombard continues with the statement that:

His (God's) will is not greater than his power, nor his power than his will, because his power and his will is one and the same thing, namely God himself.¹⁶⁸

The actions of God are the same as his will because they are God himself. Abelard had been perceived as limiting the power of God according to divine will, a position comparable with Desiderius such that 'not able' could be understood as 'not willing' but this is insufficient for Lombard as it was for Anselm, who indeed modified his view to align with the motto associated with Augustine, '*Potuit, sed noluit*', (able, but not willing).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *Gen.* 19:22, see footnote 130.

¹⁶⁷ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 43, c. 1, 3 (187): '*hoc verbum debet venenum habere*'.

¹⁶⁸ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 43, c. 1, 8 (187): '*quod nec voluntas potentia, nec potentia voluntate maior est, quia una et eadem res est potentia, voluntas, scilicet ipse Deus, qui esset maior se ipso, si voluntas esset maior potentia vel potentia voluntate.*'

¹⁶⁹ Marcia Colish works through the Aristotelian and Boethian influences of Abelard and presents how Lombard focuses more on Augustine in order to free God from the logical necessitarianism with which Abelard encumbers him and 'liberate God simultaneously from an economic theology and from the limits of logic understood purely as a science of discourse.' M.L. Colish, Peter Lombard and Abelard: The *Opinio Nominalium* and Divine Transcendence, *Vivarium* 30 (1992), 154. Also W.J. Courtenay, 'The Dialectic of Divine Omnipotence' in *Covenant and Causality* (1984), 4.

Having established that God could do other than he does, in *distinction* 44 Lombard sharpens the dilemma by asking:

Whether God can do anything better than he does?¹⁷⁰

Lombard explains, God could not do better, and uses the generation of the Son as his illustration, assuming with the Platonic tradition that offspring are always slightly less than the generators, or, as in the tradition, at best equal to the one that generates. Lombard, playing on the assumed equality between Father and Son, said

God could not generate someone better than himself, for there is nothing better than God,¹⁷¹

Likewise, the question is raised if it would be better that God had made man such that he did not sin, i.e. would it be better if man is only good? If man were only good then he would not be in need of atonement, and yet the crucifixion of Jesus was God's plan for the redemption of fallen man and not an afterthought following the collapse of 'plan A' in which man never sinned.

Having resolved that God could neither do different nor better, the question becomes one of action within time, and therefore power as Lombard posed:

Whether God can always do what he was once able to do?¹⁷²

Lombard's proposal moves away from being an issue of the extent of power and uses human ideas of time and language to leave the thought that God is not always able to do all that which he was at some time able to do. Lombard continues with the response:

Well he was once able to become incarnate. So, because God can always do what he once did, and he does not lose knowledge or power. As he was able to become incarnate he is now able to have been incarnate which is by the same power.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 44, c. 1, 1 (188): '*Utrum Deus possit facere aliquid melius quam facit.*'

¹⁷¹ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 44, c. 1, 1 (188): '*Deus quem genuit quoniam meliorem se generare non potuit (nihil enim Deo meleus) debuit aequalem.*'

¹⁷² Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 44, c. 2, 1 (189): '*Utrum Deus semper possit omne quod olim potuit.*'

¹⁷³ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 44, c. 2, 2 (189): '*Ad quod dicimus quia, sicut omnia semper scit quae aliquando scivit, et semper vult quae aliquando voluit, nec unquam aliquam scientiam amittit vel voluntatem mutat quam habuit, ita omnia semper potest quae*

Lombard accepted but adapted the nominalist idea of Abelard with regards to the immutability of knowledge. The formula ‘*semel scit Deus, semper sciat et semper scierit*’ (What God knows, he always knows and always has known), in *distinction* 41,¹⁷⁴ proposes that God knows simultaneously and unchangeably all things that were, are and will be, both good and evil and he also foreknows all future things, both good and evil. It has been suggested that it must be difficult for God to know about everything as it happens. Lombard reasons, as he swats a particular fly, many other flies are being swatted around the globe, and yet many, in some parts, are hatching to the despair of humans but delight of the hungry spider population. Therefore, how could anyone know how many there are at any given moment or likewise fish in the sea for instance. God knows, and always has done, how many hairs there are on my head because his knowledge is not like his creation that changes. While the idea of God’s knowledge being constant helps to comprehend his omniscience, it opens the question of whether or not God deliberates over decision making, even if only for an instant. Issues of time are known by God, but are of concern only from a human perspective. As temporal beings, our world and our knowledge of it changes. As eternal, God can know or foreknow all that he is able to do, and he is able to do what he will never do; and so he is able to know or foreknow that which he will never do, and which neither is, nor was. It is from our perspective and through our appropriation of language using tenses that knowledge advances. God can do or can have done, what he could at some time do. Therefore, all actions that we can think of do not change who God is. Because the incarnation was within time, the content of God’s knowledge and power is expressed differently, but God’s will is eternal and his actual knowledge and effective power remain constant. We have been given questioning minds but questioning God is not the best use of this God-given talent because at best all we contemplate is a human perspective from within our temporal limitation. When we act, it involves decision making and timing and so it is difficult to grasp what is taking place when God acts. Our actions change the person we are but God effects causes and exercises power without undergoing change.

aliquando potuit, nec unquam aliqua potentia sua privatur. Non est ergo privatus potentia incarnandi vel resurgendi, licet non possit modo incarnari vel resurgere. Sicut enim potuit olim incarnari, ita et potest modo esse incarnatus; in quo eiusdem rei potentia monstratur.’

¹⁷⁴ Lombard, I *Sent.*, d. 41, c. 2, 2 (184): ‘*semel scit Deus, semper sciat et semper scierit*’.

Scholastic advances

Whereas Abelard had been questioned and condemned, Lombard was widely respected and so the nominalist position from the ‘*semel scit Deus, semper sciat et semper scierit*’ principle retained some credence until the early 13th century, although with some modifications needed to deal with issues such as time. As seen above in *distinction* 44, he acknowledged that:

God is always able to do what he once could, that is to have all the power which he once had... But he is not always able to do (or make) all that at some time he was able to do.¹⁷⁵

Lombard’s qualifier here testifies that it seems impossible to consider God as all-powerful without applying some constraint as a limitation, and time is acknowledged as a factor in what it is possible for God to do. Commentaries on the *Sentences* on this issue of time were likewise presented by Bandinus and also Peter of Poitiers who said that while the extent of God’s power remained constant, God was not always able to repeat what he had once done, such as create the world or become incarnate.¹⁷⁶ Another idea that became a key to further modifications was to consider the standpoint from which knowledge is understood. Bonaventure (c.1221–1274 AD),¹⁷⁷ introduced this notion which might be regarded as representative of treatments bridging this issue from the early scholastic period through the time of Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. God in his divine intellect possesses a knowledge that is immutable, and in this sense *semel est verum, semper est verum*, in agreement with Lombard. However, when knowledge is understood from the standpoint of creation then things change and so knowledge changes. As Courtenay writes, ‘in a parallel way Bonaventure held the immutability of divine power, while acknowledging the changes in things that come

¹⁷⁵ Lombard, I *Sent.*, d. 44, c. 2, 4 (189), see appendix ii.

¹⁷⁶ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 66, summarising Peter of Poitiers, *Sententiae* I, 8 (I, 69). See also for a commentary on this, Bandinus, *De sacrosancta Trinitate sive Liber primus sententiarum*, d. 41 (PL 192, 1023-4).

¹⁷⁷ For background on Bonaventure see C.M. Cullen *Bonaventure, Great Medieval Thinkers* (Oxford, 2006), 3-22; É. Gilson, *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure* (Paris, 1924), 9-88.

under God's power, so that God cannot now do all that he once could do.'¹⁷⁸ It is not that God is changing but that creation is subject to time and so the past must remain past and the future, although new, can only move on from what is past. The next moment in time exists in consequence of the current one, which was moulded by the previous one.¹⁷⁹

The 13th century also saw the development of the terms used to present the developing concept of God's omnipotence. One-time student of Paris, Stephen Langton (c.1150–1228 AD)¹⁸⁰ is noted for several achievements including dividing the scriptures into chapters and providing the first commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*. The background of Langton's situation proves that Eckhart was not the first occupying a high position within the Church to use the omnipotence debate at a time when there was intense scrutiny into the nature of papal power. Langton was a focal point in a dispute between Pope Innocent III and King John of England. Papal powers had reached what was to be their peak when Innocent nominated Langton for the see of Canterbury but John, aware of the power now being flexed across Europe by Innocent, resisted the appointment. Innocent responded with an interdict of 1208 AD that deprived John's subjects of taking part in the spiritual life of the Church. Earlier, in 1200 AD Innocent had used this weapon effectively against Philip Augustus of France. John was excommunicated and eventually the English monarch, like the French, was forced to succumb to papal power and in 1213 AD Langton was installed at Canterbury. Combining Church and political duties, Langton was one of the leading mediators in negotiations at Runnymede between the King and his barons to produce the Magna Carta of 1215 AD. His influence is reflected in the first clause of the Magna Carta stating that, 'The English Church shall be free and shall have its rights undiminished and its liberties unimpaired.'¹⁸¹ The power of the Church was established

¹⁷⁸ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 68, see Bonaventure, *Sentences* I, d. 41, a. 2, q. 2 (I, 739) and d. 44, a. 2, q. un. (I, 791).

¹⁷⁹ See T. Kim, '“Ez wære allez éin lieht” an Artist's Advance' in Advance' in Jutta Vinzent and Christopher M. Wojtulewicz (eds), *Performing Bodies: Time and space in Meister Eckhart and Taery Kim*, Eckhart: Texts and Studies, vol. 6 (Leuven, 2016), 31-7.

¹⁸⁰ For background on Langton see A.M. Landgraf, *Introduction à l'histoire de la littérature théologique de la scolastique naissante*, A. Landry (ed.), L. Geiger trans. (Montreal, 1973), 167-72.

¹⁸¹ *Magna Carta*, third revision issued 11th February 1225 AD, see appendix ii.

but not without resentment.

Lawrence Moonan notes that in his commentary on the *Sentences*, Langton responds to the question of whether or not God can do everything by saying that '*Deus omnia potest*,' is true if taken as a complete proposition. However, if it is taken as incomplete then it could be true or false depending on what is supplemented.¹⁸² If the infinitive *agere*, to act, is added then the proposition is false. However, by adding *facere*, to do or make, then this completes what may be a true proposition because God, in theory, is able to bring about anything. The difference seems to be made by the actual deed being done and so also there is an openness to the thought of a restriction to omnipotence. Treatment of the debate here shows the need for careful wording and the distinction between a proposition and a propositional function. The open propositional function, or expression gave scope for discussions of the nature increasingly prevalent in the growing universities. Langton's comments here though represent an early contribution to the omnipotence debate by showing that to say that God can do everything, needs qualification.

Langton also commented on the Genesis account when the angel told Lot that he could not do anything until Lot had reached Zoar.¹⁸³ He considers Augustine's link between the power and the will of God, and points out that it is a matter of the justice of Lot rather than God.¹⁸⁴ However if the justness of God is to be questioned, then he can only act within this justness. While God's justness is not dependent on Lot, his action was bound by the arrangement made between Lot and the angel so the power for God to act is being connected with the rightness of God to act.

A notable student of Langton was Godfrey, (also known as Geoffrey or Godefridus) of Poitiers whose major work was his *Summa Theologiae*, probably compiled between 1213

¹⁸² L. Moonan, *Divine Power. The Medieval Power Distinction up to its Adoption by Albert, Bonaventure and Aquinas* (Oxford, 1994), 54-5. Moonan summarises Langton in *Der Sentenzenkommentar des Kardinals Stephan Langton*, in Artur M. Landgraf (ed.), *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*, 37/1, *distinction* 42 (1952), 58-9, see appendix ii.

¹⁸³ *Gen.* 19: 22, see footnote 130.

¹⁸⁴ See L. Moonan, *Divine Power*, (1994), 55-6, summarising *Der Sentenzenkommentar des Kardinals Stephan Langton*, A.M. Landgraf (ed.), *distinction* 43 (1952), 60, see appendix ii.

and 1215 AD.¹⁸⁵ This included a section on the different ways the noun '*potentia*' might be understood and is summarised here because these Latin terms are helpful in seeing how the concept of omnipotence was evolving:

- 1) *Habilitas*: The potential or ability to do something. Such as to walk although bound at the moment.
- 2) *Facultas*: A resource as in, 'I cannot give you silver or gold, but what I have I give you'. *Acts* 3:6.
- 3) *Facultas gratiae*: An endowment of grace as in, 'He gave them power to become sons of God', *John* 1: 12, or 'No one can come to me [unless the Father draws him]'. *John* 6:44.
- 4) *Dignitas preeminentie*: A dignity of pre-eminence as in, 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers [for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God]'. *Rom.* 13:1.
- 5) *Dignitas officii*: A dignity tied with office, as in any priest has the power to bind or loose. (Taken from *Matt.* 18:18).
- 6) *Debitum*: What is due, as in *potuit quidem de potentia set non de iustitia*, (able to act in power but not in justice).
- 7) *Voluntas*: The will to do something, as in 'They could not believe (the prophet Isaiah)', *John* 12:39. Or in 'God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted [beyond what you can bear]. *1 Cor.* 10:13.
- 8) *Officium copule*: The power to bind as in the power to believe. (Maybe from *Mark* 9:23-24).
- 9) *Possibilitatem*: To believe things are possible such as the being of Anti-Christ.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ For background on Godfrey see R. Aubert, s.v., 'Godefroy de Poitiers' in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* (Paris, 1912).

¹⁸⁶ See L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 59-60, summarising Godfrey of Poitiers, *Summa Theologiae*, MS Bruges Stad. Cod. Lat. 220, fol. 35, cit. A.M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte*, I/1 (1954), 245: '*Nota, quod hoc nomen potentia multipliciter accipitur: Potentia est habilitas, que disponet hominem ad actum, que copulatur, cum dicitur: iste non potest gradi, demonstrato ligato. Facultas, cum dicitur: non possum tibi dare. Facultas gratie: dedit ei potestatem filios Dei fieri; nemo potest venire ad me. Dignitas preeminentie: ut: Omnia potestatibus subdita sint. Dignitas officii: ut quilibet*

Godfrey presents a wide range of suggestions but elsewhere in his *Summa*, he also approached the question of power more narrowly by considering the nature of the power given to Christ and refers to power in its immensity as *de potentia absoluta* that is constrained to be appropriate as *de potentia conditionali*.¹⁸⁷ He seems to express concern that if any delegated power meant that Christ were not able to do everything then this would mean being limited and imply weakness and so delegated power is out of absolute power and of absolute power. Then there is the mention of ‘conditional power’ as a defined amount of power that might have been delegated to Christ in order to complete his earthly mission. Godfrey states that Christ could not receive conditional power because then, on Christ’s action as a man, people would be putting their trust in man. The idea of Neoplatonic flow and return is brought into consideration by mention that if man held power then his hope would be in man and so he would not return to his source.

Clearly from *New Testament* texts, Jesus possessed miraculous powers, and this power came from God, and he delegated it to his disciples.¹⁸⁸ The disciples could use the power of God to perform miracles but this was not absolute power. Although the nature of conditional power and the absolute power delegated to Christ are not clearly defined there

sacerdos habet potestatem ligandi atque solvendi. Debitum: potuit quidem de potentia, set non de iustitia. Voluntas: Non poterant credere Ysai; fidelis Deus, qui non patietur vos temptari etc. Quandoque tantum habet officium copule: ut: potest credere. Quandoque possibilitatem, ut cum dicitur: antichristus potest esse.’ I have added the Latin key term and text references to this re-wording of Moonan’s translation which does not include mention of the last two points that appear in Landgraf.

¹⁸⁷ See W.J. Courtenay, *The Dialectic of Divine Omnipotence* (1984), and L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 60-1 summarising Godfrey of Poitiers, *Summa Theologiae*, from MS Avranches, Bibliothèque de la ville, Cod. Lat. 121, fol. 137^r, in A.M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte*, II/2 (1954), 103, see appendix ii.

¹⁸⁸ *Matt. 13:54: ‘et veniens in patriam suam docebat eos in synagogis eorum ita ut mirarentur et dicerent unde huic sapientia et virtutes.’ Matt. 28:18-19: ‘et accedens Iesus locutus est eis dicens data est mihi omnis potestas in caelo et in terra, euntes ergo docete omnes gentes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.’ Luke 9:1: ‘convocatis autem duodecim apostolis dedit illis virtutem et potestatem super omnia daemonia et ut languores curarent.’ John 13:3: ‘sciens quia omnia dedit ei Pater in manus et quia a Deo exivit et ad Deum vadit.’*

is the notion of a distinction between the two with the '*potentia conditionali*' being used to describe power from God that could possibly be less than absolute. The *condicionali* could relate to the idea of *ordinata* but the ambiguity of this reference to *condicionali* makes the link tenuous beyond acknowledging some aspect of power contained within the *absoluta*. Also innovative, and a reason why Godfrey is credited as the first to apply the power distinction in the way that became standard, is that this is an early occasion (not after 1219 AD) of using *absoluta* as an adjective modifying the divine power rather than just the adverbial *absolute* suggesting a distinction between what God is potentially able to do and what he wills to do.¹⁸⁹

Comparable with Godfrey in reflecting the theological thinking of this period is William of Auxerre¹⁹⁰ who was a noted disputant at the University of Paris before being sent, along with Godfrey, by the King of France to Rome to argue his case. He was however more successful in promoting the cause of his University than the King by securing the bull of 1231 AD which became the University's charter. William has been credited with the first commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* to incorporate questions from *disputationes*, reflecting his passion for the quodlibet sessions. He refers to an unknown group who are considering Augustine's question of whether God had other means of salvation available and suggests that out of the pure power of God another manner was possible. However, it was necessary by the terms of the promise which had already been made, that the Son of God should suffer, and that the human race should be redeemed in this way.¹⁹¹ Mention here of the '*pura potentia dei*', suggests this is an unrestricted power in contrast with power exercised by the choice of God for the means for salvation. Within this pure power there could be any manner of ways God could work salvation but he chose to do this in a specific way implying that the things that God does are limited because of who God is, although any limitation is self-imposed. This is distinction between what could be done

¹⁸⁹ See G. van den Brink, *Almighty God* (1993), 72.

¹⁹⁰ For background on William see J. Ribailier, *Summa Aurea* (of William of Auxerre), Introduction Générale (Paris, 1980-7), 3-24.

¹⁹¹ See William of Auxerre, *Summa Aurea*, (ed.) J. Ribailier, 3 (1986), 96. '*quasi diceret Augustinus: si respiciamus ad puram potentiam dei, alius modus possibilis fuit deo, scilicet quantum ad puram potentiam dei; sed propter promissionem quae iam facta erat, necessarium erat. Filium Dei passurum, et sic redimendum genus humanum.*' Trans. here and following L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 63.

and what God chooses to do.

William also engaged with the omnipotence debate by referring to another focal point brought by Augustine when using the *de iustitia* constraint from the account of Lot to explain why God could not damn Peter and save Judas. He modifies the treatment of Augustine as referred to above when he said there were many things *de potentia* which God cannot do *de iustitia*.¹⁹²

William's responds:

We say that God '*de potentia pura considerata*' can damn Peter, with respect to the power of God and the natural power of Peter by which he was able to sin and not sin. But 'therefore he can damn Peter' does not follow, because this verb '*potest*' in the conclusion has reference to merits.¹⁹³

The *potentia pura considerata* is the declaration that it is possible for God to do anything. The *de iustitia* limitation is found in *habito respectu... merita* because Peter could not possibly be damned because of the merit earned by his actions. Whether William's portrayal of a merit system to gain salvation is acceptable, there is distinction between that which God is potentially able to do and what he is able to do based on choice which on this occasion is given as a matter of justice.

Another example of the debate in William's *Summa* also has its root in the thoughts of Augustine¹⁹⁴ who, in his *Commentary on John*, presents the case of a servant to whom

¹⁹² See Augustine, Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium Donatistarum Episcopum*, Book 1, 30, 35 (PL 43, 727; CSEL 53, 233), footnote 127.

¹⁹³ William of Auxerre, *Summa Aurea*, (ed.) J. Ribailier, 1 (1980), 212: '*dicimus quod deus de potentia pura considerata potest damnare petrum habito respectu ad potentiam Petri naturalem qua potuit peccare et non peccare. Sed non sequitur: ergo potuit damnare petrum; quia hoc verbum 'potest' in conclusione respicit merita.*'

¹⁹⁴ Augustine, *In Johannem* PL 35, col. 1417: '*Et potuit hanc potestatem servis dare, et noluit.*'; *Commentary on John* 1:33, tr. V, 7, in P. Schaff (ed.), NPNF, First Series, vol. 7 (1888): 'But the Lord Jesus Christ could, if He wished, have given power to one of His servants to give a baptism of his own, as it were, in His stead, and have transferred from Himself the power of baptising, and assigned it to one of His servants, and have given the same power to the baptism transferred to the servant as it had when bestowed by the Lord.'

Christ could have given the power to baptise but chose not to. So, in this case, notions of power, that were to become understood later through the terms *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*, can be seen in the action in which God has the power to choose. William lists three ways in which the power could not possibly be delegated: The '*potestas primae auctoritatis*' belongs to God alone, the '*potestas invocationis*' because baptism could only be invoked by the name of Jesus and the '*potestas ministerii*' as power would not be given just to a select group. These are followed by two ways in which Christ could have delegated power but was unwilling: The '*potestas excellentiae*' because of the virtue of the servant although the idea of receiving our virtue is likely to lead to questions of the nature of the virtue and the one possessing it and secondly the '*potestas cooperationis*' as a ministry of cooperation in activity with Christ.¹⁹⁵

The power of God according to justice or mercy is the same as power according to his will. God chooses to show justice and mercy according to his will¹⁹⁶ and in this case God chooses who should receive the power to baptise. The *cooperationis*, *iusta* and *miseriacordi potentia* are given as examples of the restricted power of God.

William uses the term *potentia ordinata* to express what Godfrey of Poitiers had called the *potentia conditionali* and these were generally used synonymously. However, whereas Godfrey spoke of the *potestas absoluta*, William did not add to the idea of *potentia* when describing God's unlimited power in this discussion considering the nature of the power God might delegate to his servants in the Church and precisely who might receive such power. The *potestas primae auctoritatis* is solely God's and God cannot even *de potentia ordinata* communicate this to human beings (as little as God can make a simple human being to be God), except to Christ.¹⁹⁷ The gospel texts suggest Jesus was pleased to pass on the authority that had been given to him, certainly to his disciples, and so the purpose for this specific treatment points to the growing question of delegated powers arising in the historical context. The delegation of power was to remain an important issue in the

This He would not do, in order that the hope of the baptised might be in him by whom they acknowledged themselves to have been baptised.'

¹⁹⁵ L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 72-5, summarising William of Auxerre, *Summa Aurea*, (ed.) J. Ribailier, 4 tr. 5, ch. 2, qu. 2 (1985), 90-1.

¹⁹⁶ *Rom. 9:18*: '*ergo cuius vult miseretur et quem vult indurat.*'

¹⁹⁷ See William of Auxerre, *Summa Aurea*, lib. 4, tr. 3, c. 3 (Paris, F. Regnault [1500], fol. 9^v-10^v f.), A.M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte*, III/1 (1954), 205.

power distinction through to the time of Eckhart.

William, along with Godfrey and Stephen Langton represent the connection between scholasticism with the emerging University in Paris and the growing mendicant orders, who led the push for Paris to become the key seat and cutting edge for the development of theology at the University and in the Church. The terms *absoluta* and *ordinata* were now part of scholastic thinking although it is less certain just when these two were first used precisely to present the omnipotence debate that would become such a major feature in future debates.

The developing university

The University of Paris emerged from the Cathedral Schools which had grown during the 12th century as scholars joined together to form guilds in order to gain rights, legal standing and privileges.¹⁹⁸ At this stage, there was just a developing institute of learning or *studium generale*, as the term *universitas* was used more generally for any corporate body with legal rights. With institutional growth came the need for leadership capable of appreciating the need for diplomacy as well as academic progress within ecclesiastical requirements. Initially the Church appointed a chancellor who licensed masters to teach, a process traceable in Paris from about 1170 AD, and these masters led the *Studium Generale* in Paris to become an internationally recognised centre for the arts and theology by the early 13th century. The masters were the most learned of scholars and above that the ‘regent’ held the position of chair in a particular establishment which was a rare and greatly honoured position.

Three key events moulded the character of the university in Paris as it began to take shape as an institution and the roles for teaching, learning and administration were established. Firstly, as Wei records, ‘the crisis of 1200 AD began when a German student sent a servant to buy wine and the innkeeper tried to overcharge him. The student and some of his friends assaulted the innkeeper and trashed the inn. The innkeeper went to the royal

¹⁹⁸ For the early development of the University see H. Rashdall, *The Universities of Modern Europe in the Middle Ages*, F.M. Powicke and A.B. Emden (eds), 3 vol. (Oxford, 1936); W.J. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1987); and particularly in Paris, I.P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris* (2012), 87-169.

provost of Paris, who led an attack on the hostel in which a number of German students were residing. Several students were killed. The Paris masters immediately went on strike, suspending all lectures and threatening to leave unless the king punished the provost and his men.¹⁹⁹ The king imprisoned the provost and his men for life and issued a charter protecting the rights of students and recognising masters and students as a distinct group with a special status in relation to the people of Paris. Secondly, following this recognition from the king, statutes shaping university life, are known to have been issued although now lost, following a bull sent by Pope Innocent III around 1208 AD, but primarily by Robert of Courson as a papal legate in 1215 AD. As well as providing papal recognition to the regulations for staff and students that helped to identify the institution, relations between the university, chancellor and townspeople were also articulated along with sanctions for any transgressions.

The third set of defining events of this period began in 1229 AD and involved student disturbances and a staff strike, in what became known as the *événements*. Rashdall records the killing of student protesters by what he describes as the savage police of a savage city. The account reads, ‘The soldiers fell upon the offenders... a party of perfectly innocent students... and several of them were killed.’²⁰⁰ A stand-off between the chancellor, Philip, and masters who felt unprotected led to an exodus of masters. On this occasion the chancellor was aligned with the authorities of the city and the Church, but the papal bull, *Parens Scientiarum*, of 1231 AD, established the university as a place with legal status and legislation repositioning the chancellor within the auspices of the university rather than the Church or legal system. The newly stated aim of the university was to serve the Church by transforming the men who studied there into worthy preachers²⁰¹ and so, with papal and royal privileges, this freedom to pursue academic study led to the return of masters and growth of the university.

During these formative years the Church remained strongly influential, and while the secular priest-professors would use their sometimes quite considerable income from ‘*sine curae*’ ecclesiastical positions for their own profit, often for private luxury, the money of

¹⁹⁹ I.P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture* (2012), 92.

²⁰⁰ H. Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (1936), 334-6.

²⁰¹ See I.P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture* (2012), 104-6. Wei shows how the opening passages of the bull draw from Gregory the Great’s treatment of *Job* in *Moralia in Job libri XI-XXII*, M. Adriaen (ed.), *CChr.SL* 143A (1979).

the mendicant orders was channelled directly into their studies, which meant they increasingly both provided the better resources and filled the more prestigious positions. At first this would seem detrimental to academic progress with monastic credentials coming ahead of educational ones. In practice, however, the friars got on with the task of progressing the university along the same track as the secular theologians, but with their added experience of teaching theological matters, along with papal clout and mendicant finance to support the cause.

The turbulent times of the *événements* had shown the need to structure the learning environment and, while these appointments were certainly political as well as theological, they also marked a new scholarly emphasis. Whereas secular priests retained their priestly duties, friars from mendicant orders could devote themselves to learning, although the chair obviously needed to engage with university, Church and court business. The university re-emerged as the key centre for learning and the Dominicans and Franciscans were keen to procure magisterial chairs to mark this as a prestigious seat of learning. The conferring of a license to Roland of Cremona (1178-1259 AD), by Philip in 1229 AD, to become the first Dominican teaching master marks the entry of mendicant orders to key offices within the university.²⁰²

The influences around the Paris University in this first half of the 13th century are reflected in significant developments brought to the power distinction by Philip the Chancellor, Hugh of St Cher and Alexander of Hales who held various positions in the emerging institution. Philip an administrator and theologian, represents the gathering momentum of the institution as a centre for education, embracing wider influences such as Arabic philosophy. Hugh, a lawyer and theologian, reflects the growing legal status of the university and development of canon law following the *Concordia discordantium canonum*, which became known as the *Decretum Gratiani* from about 1140 AD produced in Bologna. Alexander, as a diplomat, dealt with issues between the Church, state and university, and as a theologian considered ways of expanding the distinction by considering the nature of the *potentia absoluta*.

Philip (c.1160-1236 AD), was the illegitimate son of a priest and archdeacon of Paris and was appointed to the office of Chancellor of the Cathedral of Notre Dame and thereby the

²⁰² See L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 77.

University of Paris in 1217 AD.²⁰³ He would have been responsible for the material property of the diocese as well as ensuring the theology faculty was upholding Church tradition on behalf of the bishop. Initially an ecclesiastical appointment, he remarkably retained office while the university grew as an educational establishment, although this could be due to his shrewdness in manoeuvring between political camps. He initially opposed the appointment of William of Auvergne as Bishop of Paris and yet later gained William's favour in his developing role at the university, probably by being instrumental in the introduction of friars. Philip was well respected in his day as evidenced by Callus who noted that several Franciscans copied his work including Alexander of Hales, though it should be mentioned that he also copied extensively from Alexander and others.²⁰⁴ Callus concludes, 'Perhaps no other work of the first half of the 13th century exercised such a wide influence upon the theologians of the time as the *Summa de Bono* of Philip the Chancellor.'²⁰⁵

Like Meister Eckhart later, he spoke about the power of God from a familiarity with holding power, the delegation of power and the accompanied power struggles over ecclesiastical and legal matters. Also, as Eckhart would do later, Philip spoke into the power distinction by calling on the work of Avicenna whose works had been translated into Latin in the 12th in century. Avicenna (Ibn Sina, c.980–1037 AD),²⁰⁶ had proposed that just because something has essence, it does not necessarily mean it has existence. Eckhart cites Avicenna in his *Commentary on Exodus*, when explaining why God is the only one whose essence is identical with his existence.²⁰⁷ The logical sequence begins with the proposition that if something is non-contradictory, such as a square circle would be, then it is possible, (in essence). Secondly, something that is possible must be contingent on a set of circumstances in order to exist. This means the essence of

²⁰³ For background on Philip see N. Wicki (ed.), '*Philippi Cancellarii Parisiensis "Summa de bono"*', ad fidem codicum primum', 2 vols. (Berne, 1985), intro.

²⁰⁴ W.H. Principe, *Philip the Chancellor's Theology of the Hypostatic Union* (1975), 21.

²⁰⁵ D.A. Callus, 'Philip the Chancellor and the *De anima* ascribed to Robert Grosseteste', *Med. Ren. Stud.* I (1941-3), 105-27, 125.

²⁰⁶ For background on Avicenna see L.E. Goodman, *Avicenna* (London and New York, 1992), 1-48. Also for Avicenna on essence, necessity and possibility see S. van Riet (ed.), *Avicenna Latinus I* (Louvain, 1977), 43-55.

²⁰⁷ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 15 (LW II 21, 4-6).

something is possible without existence. For anything to exist there needs to be a necessary existent and this was what Avicenna regarded as the proof for the existence of God. The only necessary existence is God and everything else has essence, which is neutral, and in order to exist, must see a cause or chain of causes. Avicenna said any infinite regress of contingent causes would not lead back to God, but because there needed to be something existing in the first place to set off the chain, this must be God.

Included in *Question eight* of Philip's *Summa de bono* is a discussion on, 'whether the propositional objects of faith have to be necessary, or may be contingent?'²⁰⁸ This is considered by looking at the proposition of Christ becoming incarnate as a response to the discussion raised initially by Augustine, and later by William of Auxerre, on whether the incarnation of Christ was the only manner possible for our salvation. Philip, adopting the model of Avicenna, distinguishes between the natures of propositions in that simple propositions are true only when they become true, whereas necessary propositions are inexorably going to become true. The proposition that Christ will become incarnate could be considered firstly in its intrinsic content (essence) and secondly, in relation to some power such that it will happen. The difference he sets, therefore, is the one between contingent or '*simpliciter*' propositions which are conditional, whereas necessary or '*ordinata*' propositions are unconditionally true. While contingency is usually linked to the subject of an event, in the case of Christ becoming incarnate, the subject is God who cannot be contingent, then the event cannot be contingent either. Philip adds that he does not simply speak about God's ordination of future events which could or could not happen, because if God ordains something then it is necessary. The notion that there is a way to perceive the action of God as potential action, whether or not it is actualised is apparent, even if, for Philip, there is effectively no difference. Without the later formulation of the power distinction, Philip has applied Avicennian logic to determine an issue raised by Augustine in a manner that would become a key means for Thomas, using the same background issue, to employ the power distinction in the recognisable format of the later 13th century.

The influence of Avicenna was continued by Roland of Cremona who is also noted for his adoption of Aristotle to whom he attributed the *Liber de Causis* he used frequently. Roland was succeeded as Chair of Theology by Hugh of St. Cher (1200–1263 AD),

²⁰⁸ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa de bono*, q.8, (ed.) N. Wicki (1985), 613-4, summarised by L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 80-6.

although it has been suggested that this appointment was set up by the Dominicans in order to retain the associated power and prestige. Hugh was a pupil of Roland although literary comparisons show that, in some respects, Hugh was the senior. His background in law and expertise in the *Sentences* were good preparation to become the first Dominican to be created cardinal.

Like William of Auxerre, Hugh integrated discussions on disputed questions into his major work of commentary on the *Sentences*. From this commentary his contribution to the power debate once more comes through Judas and Peter. He states, in reply:

To the third [objection] we say that the power of God is twofold, that is, is asserted in two ways, as absolute and conditioned. Absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) is that very power considered in itself. By this power, [God] has in himself power over all things, even to damn Peter and save Judas, etc. Conditioned power (*potentia conditionata*) of this sort is asserted such that it is in respect of the condition or law which God in his goodness has laid upon things. While these remain in force, God cannot do the contrary and he would be doing that if he were to damn Peter and save Judas, because the truth and justice of God demands that Peter should have eternal life, and Judas eternal punishment. For this is the law given by God, that he should reward the good and punish the wicked. This ‘conditioned power’ the Glossa on *Gen. 19* concerning Lot, calls ‘justice’.²⁰⁹

From this text, God has absolute power to cover all possibilities, however, similar to

²⁰⁹ Hugh of St. Cher, I *Sentences*, d. 42, q. 1, in E. Randi (ed.), *Potentia dei conditionata: Una questione di Ugo di saint Cher sull’omnipotenza divina* (1984), 534: ‘*ad tertium dicimus quod duplex est potentia dei, idest dupliciter dicitur, absoluta et conditionata. Absoluta potentia est ipsa in se considerata: hac potest in se omnia, et Petrum damnare et Iudam salvare etc. Huiusmodi potentia conditionata dicitur in quantum respicit conditionem vel legem quam deus sua bonitate rebus indidit: qua mente, non potest deus facere contrarium; quod faceret si damneret Petrum et salvaret Iudam, quia veritas et iustitia dei exigit ut petrus habeat vitam aeternam et Iudam poenam aeternam. Haec enim est lex data a deo ut bonos remunerat et malos puniat. Hanc potentiam conditionatam vocat Glossa super Gen. XIX “iustitiam”, ubi agitur de Loth.*’ Trans. L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 117.

Philip, Hugh reduces the notion of absolute power to an abstract and hypothetical self-contradictory possibility, which by the nature or essence of the divine power is *eo ipso* never to be realised. This declaration that there are two aspects of God's power, namely, absolute and conditioned, is unambiguous in its reference to the power distinction. The passage, teeming with the language of a trained lawyer, asserts that the power God determines is the *potentia conditionata* and, expressed in this way, it is as if God is legally bound to act according to it. Eternal salvation or punishment is executed according to divine judgment set out in the statutes of God (*lex data*). The use of *veritas* should be taken as the faithfulness of God, as in *Ps. 117:2*,²¹⁰ who is acting true to his principles rather than making moral judgement. When recalling another case continually recurring in the debate, Hugh proposes that the *potentia conditionata* is what is called justice in the *Genesis* account of Lot fleeing judgment on Sodom. To Hugh then, the *potentia conditionata* equates to the *potentia iustitia*. The actions of God, that are conditioned or determined by the will of God, could not be contrary to the nature of God. Therefore, when considering the actions of man, it would not be within the truth and justice of God, to damn Peter and save Judas.

Hugh also visited the power distinction when discussing the issue of delegated powers broached earlier by Godfrey of Poitiers and William of Auxerre, asking whether power, *potestatem cooperationis*, could be delegated by God out of ordained or absolute power in the context of baptism:

It should be distinguished, however, that there are two aspects to the power of God, the absolute and the ordained. Of absolute power, God could give, and still has, power to give mere man the power of cooperation. On ordained power he cannot, which means not without changing the order of things. For the absolute and ordained power of God are altogether the same. But ordained power is in respect of the order of things introduced by God. Even more, those who say that God could not give power to mere man, understand the aforesaid power as

²¹⁰ *Ps. 117:2*, 'quia confortata est super nos misericordia eius et veritas Domini in aeternum alleluia.'

ordained power of God, and the Master [Peter Lombard] understands
[it to be] as absolute [power], and so there is no conflict [of idea].²¹¹

According to this passage, God always was, and still is, able to give man the power of cooperation through his absolute power although not through his ordained power. If the *ordinata* is exactly the same as the *absoluta* then this might appear to be a contradiction, and so Hugh explains this is a matter of how the two aspects of the one power of God are to be understood. The argument presupposes, of course, that absolute power is understood as power with regards even to the possibility of self-contradiction (saving Judas and condemning Peter), while God's real power, the power of creation and salvation, is his 'ordained' power. The aspect of ordained power is the one which envisages the world as it has been ordained and created by God, while the absolute power is reduced to what would have been possible for God to create, but in fact would go against God's own nature. As seen earlier, in *distinction* 43 Lombard held that God has the potential to do things extra to his ordained will. In this case, God can communicate his power to his creatures and this includes the power to baptise for the forgiveness of sins as Lombard says:

the Lord is said to sanctify by invisible grace, and the servant by the
visible sacrament.²¹²

The Lord is the author of power, and the human servant is the minister of this created power. Lombard does not involve the power distinction in the text although he does quote Augustine to point out that the Lord does not transfer the full extent of his power to the servant baptising so that the one being baptised recognises this baptism is being done by

²¹¹ Hugh of St. Cher, *In IV Sentences* (Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Cold. Lat. 573, fol. 223^r): '*Distingui tamen debet, quod duplex est potentia Dei, absoluta et ordinata. De absoluta potentia potuit Deus et potest adhuc dare puro homini potestatem cooperationis. De potestate ordinata non potest, id est non mutato ordine rerum. Idem enim omnino est potentia absoluta Dei et ordinata. Sed potentia ordinata respicit ordinem rebus a Deo inditum. Forte illi, qui dicunt, quod Deus non potuit dare potentiam puro homini, predictam potestatem intelligunt de potentia Dei ordinata et magister intelligit de absoluta et sic nulla est contrarietas*'; see A.M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte*, III/1 (1954), 206-7. Trans. L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 127-8.

²¹² Lombard, *IV Sent.*, d. 5, c. 3(35).

a fellow servant only, while the power remains Christ's own.²¹³ It is Hugh's interpretation then, which is proposing that Lombard is portioning this action to the *potentia absoluta*. Hugh maintains that, God cannot communicate his ordained power, because mere men could interfere with the order of things, and so, for an event to be impossible out of ordained power yet possible out of absolute power does not involve a contradiction. Hugh's interpretation allows him to see no contradiction between Lombard and earlier scholars, such as Dominican, Guerric of St. Quintino who said that God could not delegate his own power, *de potestate ordinata*, but could do so, *de potestate absoluta*.²¹⁴

The idea of God giving the power of cooperation is being vented, and the key terms subsequently used to formulate the power distinction are adopted here, although only in the realm of possibility and on this occasion God shows his exclusivity by not sharing his ordained power. Hugh could well be drawing on Lombard and indeed the others mentioned to add weight to the developing issue within Church politics of the need to explain how power is delegated by God.

Alongside Philip and Hugh from this period of widespread changes to the academic, ecclesiastical, legal and social climate, consideration needs to be made of Alexander of Hales, (now Halesowen), who was the first Franciscan to hold the position of Chair of Theology in Paris.²¹⁵ One time Canon of St Pauls and Archdeacon of Coventry, Alexander (c.1180-1245 AD) studied and taught in Paris before the *événements* and on his return to the university in 1236 AD. Before that he had worked as a negotiator on behalf of the University with the pope and also on behalf of the king of England with the court of France. Alexander comments on whether God could be incarnated again:

Let it be noted that God can do all things which, to be able to do, does not come down to either not being able (*non posse*) or not being seemly (*non decere*). So although [God] could (*posset*) take flesh, in so far as his absolute power is concerned (*quoad potentiam absolutam*), he could

²¹³ Lombard, IV *Sent.*, d. 5, c. 2(34), 2 (2007-10), see Augustine, *In Ioannem*, tr. 5, n. 7.

²¹⁴ See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 73, For Guerric see Paris, Bibl. Nat., lat. 15603, fol. 11^r: '*Potestate absoluta potuit dare, sed non potestate ordinata, quae respicit ordinem rerum.*' Cited from Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte*, III (1954), 1, 207.

²¹⁵ For background on Alexander see *Glossa in quatuor libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, vol. I (Quaracchi, 1951), intro.

not in so far as his seemly power is concerned (*quoad potentiam decentem*).²¹⁶

With Lombard's *distinction* 44 in mind, the main point in this quote here is the 'potentiality' of whether God could or could not incarnate himself again. Alexander states that God can do everything except what he is unable to do or what is not decent for him to do. Of course, it would have been possible for him to take on flesh again, but it would have been indecent. Looked at from the perspective of absolute power, a second incarnation would be something possible, but with regards to decency would be impossible, hence decency, or being fitting, is linked to God's ordained power. In dealing with whether God is always able to do what he once did, Alexander explains that although this is possible *de potentia absoluta*, it would not be *de potentia ordinata*. *Decentem* is used in contrast with *absolutam* to present a self-imposed restriction based on doing what is appropriate for God to do. Whether able or not, there are things that would not be fitting for God to do. The use of *posse* and *decere* is significant because they are expressed by Eckhart to introduce the power distinction in *Question six*. Elsewhere, in his *Summa*, which is more of a Franciscan compilation than a personal volume, when contemplating the absolute power of God, 'Alexander' states:

If the power of God is conceived by the soul absolute, the soul will not be able to determine the question, or take in the boundless ocean of his power. But when the soul considers divine power as ordained with the condition of power, of truth, of goodness, I say: what is possible to God is that sort of 'capability' which is a power to do things; and he is not 'capable' in that sort of 'capability' which is a potentiality for having things done to its possessor.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Alexander of Hales, *Glossa*, I, d. 44 (1951), I, 448: 'Ad notitiam eorum quae hic dicuntur, notandum quod omnia potest Deus quae posse non est "non posse" vel "non decere". Licet ergo posset incarnari quoad potentiam absolutam, non tamen quoad potentiam decentem.' Trans. L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 130.

²¹⁷ Alexander of Hales, *Summa Halensis*, Pt. 1, inq. 1, tr. 4, q. 3, m. 3, c. 4 (1924), I, 236: 'Si potential Dei concipiatur ab anima absolute, non poterit anima determinare nec capere infinitum pelagus suae potestatis. Sed cum anima speculatur divinam potentiam ut ordinatam secundum conditionem potestatis, veritatis, bonitatis, dico quod possibile

This is not just about the soul not being able to grasp the boundless ocean of God, his nature and power but that in our minds there is an infinity of things such that we can never say that we have thought of all the things that God can do. In other words, even to human understanding there is an absolute power of God that we can only perceive as limitless. When the human mind contemplates the ordained acts of God, then these are conditioned by power, truth and goodness and so the human mind can see less than the full capacity of what God is capable of doing. The reduction in potentiality on this occasion is due to human limitation as this example of a power distinction is not so much about the power of God but our conception of God's power. Also in his *Summa* Alexander compares divine power with the divine will:

When divine power is compared simply (*absoluta*) to will, power includes more than does the divine will; when looked at from the standpoint of *potentia ordinata*, in which ordination is understood as pre-ordination, then divine power and will are co-extensive.²¹⁸

This text states that there are more things that could possibly be done through absolute power than the things that are ordained to be done. The difference can only be viewed from the angle of possibility and not the perspective of the ordained will of God from which point the two are effectively equal. Later in the same passage Alexander adds further explanation to how the *absoluta* includes things that are not ordained:

The *potentia absoluta*... is distinguished from the *potentia ordinata*. For absolute power extends to those things concerning which there is no divine pre-ordinance; but ordained power extends to those things concerning which there is a divine pre-ordinance, that is, to those things which are pre-ordained or disposed by God.²¹⁹

Deo est quod posse potentiae est et non potest quod est impotentiae. Trans L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 141.

²¹⁸ Alexander of Hales, *Summa Halensis*, Pt. I, inq. 1, tr. 4, q. 1, m. 2, c. 2 (1924), I, 207: '*Tamen comparando absolute potentiam voluntati, sic potentia in plus est quam voluntas; secundum vero quod intelligentur potentia ordinata, quae quidem ordinatio intelligitur in ratione praeordinationis, coaequantur potentia et voluntas.*' Trans. W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 73.

²¹⁹ Alexander of Hales, *Summa Halensis*, Pt. I, inq. 1, tr. 4, q. 1, m. 4 (1924), I, 135: '*Distinguitur ergo potentia absoluta [a] potentia ordinata. Potentia absoluta est eorum*

The *ordinata* is explained in contrast to the *absoluta* by the positive assumption of everything that was pre-ordained by God, and therefore existed due to God's will, while *absoluta* reflects the infinite excess of what was in fact realised or would be realised. This is not the realm of any possibility, but the addition of the things God has chosen not to do, to the things he has chosen, i.e. ordained, to do. This excess did not include miraculous events as these were seen as part of what God had pre-ordained and were not regarded as belonging to *potentia absoluta*, but to *potentia ordinata*.²²⁰ While God is temporarily suspending his own laws to act in a miraculous manner, this is not outside of his will and therefore within the *ordinata*. The apophatic leaning of Alexander can be seen in this idea that everything that God does is pre-ordained while the *absoluta* contains the things that God chooses not to do, and so does not do.

Alexander presented the power distinction in diverse ways, using several classic scenarios and by considering the *absoluta* as beyond the possibilities known, there is a bridge to later 13th century ideas, yet although his ideas were continued among Franciscan followers, it was the Dominicans who championed this debate in future years. By the middle of the 13th century two different versions of the distinction were formed which differentiated between the two formulated ideas of absolute and ordained power. The older one, preserved predominantly by Dominicans, maintained the *potentia absoluta* encompassed everything, every possibility and every realisation, viz. the *potentia ordinata*. The other, as represented by the *Summa Halensis*, identified *potentia absoluta* with those possibilities that God did not choose, even if he could have chosen them, hence excluding the *potentia ordinata*. And, for our comparison with Eckhart, even more important, as stated by Courtenay neither Franciscans nor Dominicans, by this time, ever intended to see in the *potentia absoluta* 'a description of some form of divine action. God never acts – and can never act – in an *absolute* way, since the discussion of power, viewed absolutely, leaves aside the entire question of divine volition and action... (Whether the *potentia absoluta* represents unrealised possibilities or includes both realised and unrealised possibilities), all theologians recognised that *potentia absoluta* was not a form

quorum non est divina praeordinatio; potentia vero ordinata est eorum quorum est divina praeordinatio, hoc est eorum quae a Deo sunt praeordinata sive disposita. Trans. L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 138.

²²⁰ See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 73; Alexander of Hales, *Summa Halensis*, Pt. I, inq. 1, tr. 4, q. 1, m. 4 (1924), I, 228.

of divine action in any sense.’²²¹ It was the later theological and philosophical ideas of the 13th century that can be seen in the thoughts on absolute power of Meister Eckhart, who must also have been acutely aware of the changing attitudes towards ecclesiastical, and in particular, papal power.

Adapting to philosophical developments

The establishing of European universities and a period of relative stability in Paris, saw the arrival of the translation, and increasing profile being given to the works of Aristotle (384–322 BC), as well as the introduction of Avicenna (above) and Averroës (Ibn Rushd, 1126–1198 AD). This meant Christian scholars had to consider the degree to which Graeco-Arabic thinking should be embraced as it infiltrated the academic curriculum. The continued movement towards apophaticism and abstract ideas also led towards an open door to search for new definitions for the potential power of God. The almighty hand of God, active in defeating all enemies throughout the Jewish scriptures had met with philosophical ideas in the Church cloister and council and now, as more ideas were becoming prominent, the ideological battleground for contention became the emerging university. As the potential to explore theology had grown in Paris and other early universities, the power distinction had become a means to express possibilities beyond the ones that could be realised. Instead of restricting God to being able to do simply that which he does, the sphere of possibilities could extend beyond limits suggested by necessitarianism. The *potentia absoluta* was generally understood to be the power of God to perform all the possible actions as long as these acts could possibly happen. The *potentia ordinata* referred to the power that God had bound himself to exercise by his own choice. Francis Oakley stylishly summarises this stage of the power distinction saying, ‘the stress, therefore, lies on the realm of the ordained power, which evokes the stable, concrete arrangements that the good God, who never acts in a disorderly or arbitrary fashion, has pre-ordained in his creation, has actually chosen to effect, and that we humans can, therefore safely rely upon. At the same time, the absolute power remains, as it were, on dialectical standby, a matter of abstract possibility periodically evoked to underline the contingency of creation, the world’s dependence, that is, on the untrammelled decision of the divine will, the fact that it does not have either to be what

²²¹ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 74, 77.

it is or even to be at all.’²²² In order to consider the development of this philosophical theology towards the end of the 13th century, especially in Paris, it is helpful to focus on Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas as significant predecessors and influences on Meister Eckhart.

Weisheipl records that, ‘not only was Albert (c.1200–1280 AD), the only man of the High Middle ages to be called “the Great”, but this title was used even before his death.’²²³ After studying and lecturing in Cologne he was sent to Paris where he lectured on the *Sentences* and the Dionysian corpus, and became Chair of Theology before returning to Cologne to open the new *Studium Generale*. Also like Eckhart, he acted as a provincial prior serving the Dominicans in various places including Erfurt and Strasbourg. There is no record of the two meeting but their distinguished, related career paths, albeit only the latter years of Albert coinciding with the early ones of Eckhart, mean an interesting encounter could have happened.

Albert wrote conscientiously about many topics and is highly regarded as a philosopher and scientist, but in his theology one recurring theme relevant to this discussion, because it is reiterated by Eckhart, who was clearly influenced by Albert,²²⁴ is the use of apophatic terms to describe the boundlessness of God. Albert wrote:

God is not bounded by boundaries, because he is simple; neither is his being contained in something else, but he is pure actuality, free of all potentiality, not the sort of thing which can be received in something else in respect of his being.²²⁵

²²² F. Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order* (1984), 50-1.

²²³ James A Weisheipl, ‘Albertus Magnus’, in Joseph R. Strayer (ed.), *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (1982 - 9), 129. For background on Albert see J. Weisheipl, ‘The Life and Works of St Albert the Great’ in *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays 1980* (Toronto, 1980), 13-51; A. de Libera, *Albert le Grand et la philosophie* (Paris, 1990).

²²⁴ See L. Sturlese, ‘Eckhart as Preacher, Administrator, and Master of the Sentences. From Erfurt to Paris and back: 1294-1313. The Origins of the *Opus Tripartitum*’ in Jeremiah M. Hackett (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to Meister Eckhart, Brill’s Companion to the Christian Tradition*, 36 (Leiden, 2013), 125-36.

²²⁵ Albert, *In Dion. De divinis nominibus*, ch. 13, par. 27: ‘*Deus autem neque terminis terminatum est, quia simplex est, neque esse suum est comprehensum in aliquo, sed est*

And also:

There is no bound closing off the whole thing which is God.²²⁶

These statements from his *Companion to Pseudo-Dionysius* and *Sentences Commentary* not only link forward to Meister Eckhart but could also be considered as a mediaeval connection back to Patristic times with the containing idea of the *kratera* and yet overflowing of its contents. Marking this thirteenth century development in the power distinction debate, Albert's synthesis of philosophy with theology is evidenced in the way he considers the unlimitedness of power, which should be seen in two ways; either in relation to itself, *in se*, or to what it does in relation to a specified work, *in relatione ad opus*. In itself, it is considered true that power is before knowledge and will, but in relation to work, knowledge directs and power executes, and so this power operates after knowledge and will.²²⁷ Power in itself is before any constraints, but when it is actualised, then it is under the constraints involved in the action, given in this text as knowledge and will. This logic of '*in relatione ad opus*' is used by Albert to present why God could damn Peter and save Judas but does not out of ordained wisdom.²²⁸ In terms of the power involved, as power itself, there is sufficient for God to save Judas, but this power becomes subject to the constraint of wisdom should the action take place and so because this action is unwise, this power is not actualised. The specified means of wisdom is the constraint on power in itself as just abstract potential. Here Albert relates the power distinction between the intrinsic concept of power, or potentiality, *in se* and realised power, *in*

actus purus, absolutus ab omni potentia, non receptus in aliquo secundum esse suum.' Trans L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 156.

²²⁶ Albert, *I Sentences*, d. 1, art.15, ad. 9, (ed.) Borgnet, 25: 36: '*Licet non sit terminus claudens totum quod est Deus.*' Trans here and following L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994).

²²⁷ Albert, *In I Sentences*, d. 35B, art. 3, ad. 4, 5, (ed.) Borgnet, 26: 183-184: '*Ad id quod ulterius objicitur de ordine executionis, dicendum quod ista quia quae hic tangit dupliciter considerantur scilicet in se, vel in relatione ad opus. In se considerata verum est, quod potentia est ante scientiam et voluntatem: sed in relatione ad opus est scientiam ut dirigens, et potentia ut exsequens: et sic potentia est operans post scientiam et voluntatem.*' Summarised by L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 161.

²²⁸ Albert, *In I Sentences*, d. 43C, art. 3, (ed.) Borgnet, 26: 381b: '*Dicendum quod potest quidem de potentia absoluta, sed non de potentia relata ad ordinem sapientiae.*

relatione ad opus, but in his comments on *distinction* 42, the power distinction is formed by considering whatever is possible alongside the actualised possibilities:

It must be said, however, that power should be considered in three modes. The first mode is the genus of all of the powers of any form, and so it does not act, (but it follows...the *sed sequitur* in the text is a mistake in this sentence), as knowledge and will follow any other power, as genus to species, and in this way power precedes will and knowledge.

In another mode it is said that we can compare power according to indefinite work and in this way we say of God that there are many things out of the *potentia absoluta* that he neither does nor will do.

The third mode, it is said, means power that is regulated by an operative skill, and executes something preconceived by wisdom, and something willed by a will, and it is only these things which will be done or have been done, or are.²²⁹

Albert initially presents three modes of power, but the first presents the overall genus of power which is not related to any action and so should rather be thought of as potentiality. This genus precedes the species of knowledge and will, and so the *sed sequitur* in the text, implying the reverse order, must be an error. This passage like the one above from *distinction* 35 presents how God acts according to his nature. When potentiality is being considered it is before knowledge, will and wisdom but these aspects are involved in any movement to act and so they come before actualised power.

²²⁹ Albert, *In I Sentences*, d. 42A, art. 5, sol., (ed.) Borgnet, 26: 362a: ‘*Dicendum autem, quod potentia consideratur tribus modis. Uno modo prout est genus omnium potestatum quocunque modo dictarum, et sic non est ad actum, sed sequitur, ad scientiam et voluntatem et quamlibet aliam potestatem, ut genus ad speciem: et hoc modo praecedit potentia voluntatem, et scientiam ... Alio modo dicitur potentia comparata ad opus indefinite: et hoc modo dicimus, quod Deus multa potest de potentia absoluta, quae nec facit, nec faciet. Tertio modo dicitur potentia regulata ab arte operative, et exequens praeconceptum a sapientia et volitum a voluntate: et haec non est nisi eorum quae fiunt, vel fuerunt, vel sunt.*’ Own translation with summary from L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 162-4.

The second mode considers this potentiality as related to action in general. The '*potentia comparata ad opus indefinite*' is defined as the power to do a particular thing, even though whatever it is, it may never be actually done, and so the intrinsic potential exists indifferent of any extrinsic execution leaving no restriction except the requirement of the act to be possible. This mode describes absolute power in its intrinsic nature of the potential to act, prior and regardless of the action, and so can be identified with Avicennian essence.

Mode three is power for specific action, described elsewhere as the *ordinata*. This '*potentia regulate ab arte operative*' is the power to do, 'things which will be done, or have been done, or are'. This is the power to perform the acts that are possible and these are the actions that are realised and therefore follow wisdom and will, and describe actuality rather than just potentiality. This example of the power distinction, without the use of terms *absoluta* or *ordinata*, is presented by the difference between whether power is related to action in general or to specific actions. Added to these is the notion of potentiality as a non-ontological idea unrelated to action.

Continuing on to the next article in the same distinction, Albert adds limiting conditions for an action to be possible for God. Although God as the agent of an action has the potentiality to act, because any action is subject to the object of that action then the action is thereby constrained by the object:

God can do many things '*de potentia*' which, however, cannot be done '*in creaturis*', from opposition and confusion's preventing this: opposition as in opposites; confusion as in unions of forms different in species, as in the same thing being a man and an ass, and the like.²³⁰

The context of this is a question of whether God could do the impossible and so, Albert is expanding on, and distinguishing between the things that are possible for God to do and those that could actually be done. Many things that God could do are not done because of created things which limit the actions of God through opposition and confusion. Although not a problem for God, in creation such things as contradictory events happening simultaneously count as an opposite and so could not happen. For example:

²³⁰ Albert, *In I Sentences*, d. 42A, art. 6, sol., (ed.) Borgnet, 26: 364b: '*Deus multa potest de potentia, quae tamen non possunt fieri in creaturis, impediante oppositione et confusione: oppositione ut in oppositis: confusione autem, ut in unionibus formarum specie differentum, ut quod idem sit homo et asinus et huiusmodi.*'

Preston North End could win the championship in 2017 but, if they do, then Blackpool could not, as this would not only be a tragedy, but also simultaneously impossible, or ‘opposite’. The implication is made that these are opposites in the created world as we comprehend it, and so outside of this world and its order, there is no such restriction. Likewise, to be ‘a thing’ there must be no confusion, i.e. mixing of forms or intersection of things. If there is confusion caused by the mixing of forms then this leads to a lack of distinction in identity, for example a man and an ass are distinct and cannot be mixed, and so the act cannot be considered among that of everything possible, or ‘a thing’.

Albert considers the idea that nothing is impossible for God starting from the verse from *Luke’s Gospel* suggesting it would seem impossible for a virgin to be with child. He acknowledges that nothing is indeed impossible for God, but not all things will be done by God.²³¹ Albert places no restriction on what God could do and the sum of everything executed by God is not a measure of the full power of God. Courtenay suggests this is an example of how Albert used the distinction as ‘a serviceable device for attacking Aristotelian, Avicennian and Averroistic views on the absolute necessity of the content and structure of the world.’²³² In this distinction, by distinguishing between potentiality and actuality, and proposing any difference is due to and within creation, Albert has built a platform that connects with Aquinas and also is later developed by Eckhart in *Question six*.

Albert continues this thinking in his comments on *distinction* 43 when he deals with the Abelardian limitation:

We make reply to these things, opening out a twofold understanding of the words, unfolding in this way the things made involved by them: ‘God cannot do save what is good and just’ that is, cannot do save what, if he were to do it, would be good and just - is true. But he can do many things which are not good or just, because they neither are nor will be;

²³¹ Albert, *In I Sentences*, d. 42A, art. 6, sol., (ed.) Borgnet, 26: 364b - 6: ‘*Ad aliud dicendum, quod nihil est Deo impossibile facere, quod non dicit impotentiam: sed ad fieri non omnia sunt possibilia apud Deum... Ad aliud dicendum, quod potentia absoluta considerata generalior est quam est ars vel scientia practica: et ideo illa obiectio non procedit, nisi de potentia exequente, et non de potentia absoluta considerata.*’ Summarised by L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 165-6.

²³² W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 87.

nor are done well, nor will be done well; because they never will be done.²³³

Without using the language of possibility, on this occasion Albert follows Lombard to propose that if there were any things to be done, other than the things that are done, then God would not lack power to do them. By stating that God could do other than he does in respect of power, but does not do because he only acts in ways that are good and just, Albert is adopting the Anselmian idea that God acts according to his nature, but this response neither disregards Abelard nor those who considered Abelard to have placed a limitation on God.

Moving on to *distinction* 44 Albert also brought contemporary thinking to bear when dealing with the issue of whether God could do again what he had previously done:

But more truly and more probably what seems to me to have to be said, is that there is power considered absolutely and that it is always the same; but that there is power conjoined to actuality which is determined by its mode of signification in view of the thing which is being referred to it; and the argument is not the same in the latter relation: and also in this latter it can neither now work just in the way it has been able to do things before, nor does it introduce change in it, but into the thing on which the power is being exercised.²³⁴

Rather than resolve this issue just by considering how God operates with respect to time, Albert uses two terms that form a model for the power distinction. The *potentia coniuncta*

²³³ Albert, *In I Sentences*, d. 43, art. 6, *sol.*, (ed.) Borgnet, 26: 376: ‘*His autem respondemus, duplicem verborum intelligentiam aperientes, et ab eis involuta evolventes sic: Non potest Deus facere nisi quod bonum est et iustum, id est, non potest facere nisi illud quod si faceret, bonum et iustum esset verum est: sed multa potest facere quae non bona sunt nec iusta, quia nec sunt, nec erunt, nec bene fiunt, nec fient, quia numquam fient.*’

²³⁴ Albert, *In I Sentences*, d. 44, art. 6, (ed.) Borgnet, 26: 399: ‘*Sed verius et probabilius videtur mihi dicendum, quod est potentia absolute considerata, et haec eadem est semper: et est potentia coniuncta actui, et haec determinatur secundum modum significandi ad rem quae refertur ad eam: et ratio non est eadem in relatione illa: et hac non potest modo quicquid potuit, nec haec ponit mutationem in eo, sed in re in quam potest.*’ Own trans. adapted from trans. L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 170.

actui, translated here as the power conjoined to actuality is contrasted with the *potentia absolute considerata* and the tool used to exercise this solution is that of the idea of modes of significance. This is an interesting development because ‘Modism’ was being formulated during the 13th century with the key text of Thomas of Erfurt, *De Modis Significandi*, only being written in around 1310 AD, by which time the popularity of the ideas proposed was already waning. The speculative grammarians, or ‘Modistae’, built on Priscian’s ‘ten parts of speech’ and Aristotle’s ‘ten categories’ to devise a system of emphasising the actual meaning of a word, exploring it within the context of its grammatical position. Kelly notes Albert’s awareness of developments in grammar and that philosophical norms are not entirely appropriate to grammar stating, ‘Albertus Magnus in particular is very meticulous about distinguishing the different objects of logic and grammar: logic had truth as its object, while grammar had *congruitas*.’²³⁵

There are several traces of Modistic ideas within Albert’s writings although the *Quaestiones Alberti de Modis significandi* dates from c.1285 AD and so is not authentic. The twenty one questions in this work, now attributed Pseudo-Albert, reflect speculative grammar as it was taught in Paris in the 1270s and 1280s and contain the thoughts of both Albert and Thomas, especially in their commentaries on the *Perihermeneias*.²³⁶ It should be noted also that Meister Eckhart used the idea of modes of significance in his *Commentary on Exodus*,²³⁷ in the section discussing omnipotence. In the above text, Albert shows that only absolute power is being considered, in itself isolated from any other context, whereas the ordained power of God is considered with regard to its object and the context of action. When this ordained power acts, such a relation towards an object and such a situation within a context does not alter the power itself, although the acting power introduces difference and change in the object. Only absolute power is always the same, yet ordained power excludes repetition. Or in other words, God in his

²³⁵ L.G. Kelly, ‘‘Composito’ in Grammatica Speculativa’, in G.L. Bursill-Hall, S. Ebbesen and E.F.K. Koerner (eds), *De Ortu Grammaticae: studies in medieval grammar and linguistic theory in memory of Jan Pinborg* (1990), 156. *Congruitas* is the construction of a sentence enabling the syntax of the sentence to have order, and thereby giving the sentence meaning. See E. Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire* (2007), 118-20.

²³⁶ See *Quaestiones Alberti de modis significandi*, L.G. Kelly (ed.) (1977), intro.

²³⁷ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 54 (LW II 58,1–60,5), see B. McGinn, *Teacher and Preacher* (1987), 60-1.

absolute power is the same and always acts in the same way, whereas God in his ordained power never repeats himself and never acts twice in an identical manner. This does not mean that when God acts in his ordained power, he or his power are subject to change or alteration, but that because the way his power works always includes the relation to the object of the action, and is always contextual, then this action is put into practice and received differently each time.

In his treatment of whether a different means of salvation were possible Albert considers if God has the power to act in a manner extrinsic to his nature. Rather than two powers Albert highlights two modes of the same power:

It is to be said that God's power is one and simple but can be considered in either of two ways: first as executing a wise foresight and ordinance, and so considered, it seems that no other way was possible for our liberation, than the one in the foresight of the ordaining wisdom; yet another manner could have been foreseen, and then the power operating would be executing that other manner; in another way [God's power] may be considered, secondly, according as it stands antecedently to the [ordaining] wisdom; for God can do things which through the wisdom ordaining all things he has not ordained that he will do – and speaking with a determination mentioning that power, another manner was possible; and the saints often spoke that possibility.²³⁸

As with other previous solutions, the conclusion is sorted by acknowledging a mode of power was available but never to be exercised. The power of God to act extrinsic to his nature is described as absolute power to execute actions which are not ordained according to wisdom. God's ordained power, however, is limited by what is foreseen and pre-

²³⁸ Albert, *In III Sentences*, d. 20B, art. 3, (ed.) Borgnet, 28: 358-359: '*Dicendum, una et simplex est Dei potentia: sed tamen potest dupliciter considerari, scilicet ut exsequens sapientiae praevisionem et ordinationem, et sic videtur, quod non fuit alius modus possibilis nostrae liberationis, quam praevisus est a sapientia ordinante: sed tamen potuit esse alius modus praevisus, et tunc potentia operans alium exsequeretur. Aliter consideratur secundum quod antecedenter se habet ad sapientiam: potest enim Deus facere quae per sapientiam omnia ordinantem, non ordinavit se facturum: et de hac potentia loquendo, alius fuit modus possibilis: et de hac possibilitate loquuntur Sancti plerumque.*'

ordained by wisdom and therefore another means for salvation could not have been foreseen or actualised because this would have not been part of God's ordaining wisdom. Only with regards to absolute power could God have run the course of this world in a different way. By considering absolute power as *potentia operans* there is a slight lean towards the idea of Eckhart that absolute power is not only abstract, but active, although in Albert, the reasoning about an operating absolute power is only presented hypothetically.

Albert exercised the power distinction using a number of different formats, rooting it in the past by referring to Plato,²³⁹ using classic examples such as those of Augustine and yet also representing 13th century developments with contemporary thinking and terminology. He was in Paris at the critical time of the transmission of Arabic thinking into Latin and his paraphrase is unique in that it is the first known example of the interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in Latin that relies on both Avicenna's and Averroes' work on the subject. His attitude towards these two sources, however, is not only receptive, but also critical, as seen in his rejection of particular theories advanced by both Avicenna and Averroes.²⁴⁰

Equally prominent in philosophical theology with Albert during this period, and likewise unquestionably influential on Eckhart, was Thomas Aquinas (c.1226–1274 AD).²⁴¹ At the age of five, Thomas was dispatched to the abbey at Monte Cassino, scene of Damian's question of the fallen virgin. The family motive in sending Thomas was probably to gain a foothold in the local abbey, which they sacked anyway shortly afterwards. After studying at Frederick's University in Naples, like Eckhart, he became a Dominican, preceding the Meister by studying and teaching in Cologne as well as twice holding the prestigious Chair of Theology in Paris.

²³⁹ See Albert, *Summa Theologiae*, Tract. Xix, q. 78, (ed.) Borgnet, 31: 832, in a rare quote from Plato's *Meno* 73ab in the 12th century translation, in V. Kordeater and C. Labowsky (eds), *Plato Latinus*, I (London, 1940); L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 179.

²⁴⁰ See A. Bertolacci, 'Avicenna's and Averroes's Interpretations and their Influence in Albertus Magnus', in Fabrizio Amerini and Gabriele Galluzzo (eds), *A Companion to the Latin Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Leiden and Boston, 2014), 95-136.

²⁴¹ For background on Thomas see J.A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Work* (New York, 1974).

Aquinas began lecturing on the *Sentences* at Paris in 1252 AD while tensions existed between secular clerics and the mendicants who had financial backing and were beginning to monopolise teaching chairs. By 1256 AD the Dominicans were so unpopular that they needed an armed guard at the front of their convent and although Aquinas' appointment to Regent Master was opposed locally, it was supported by the pope. The seculars resented their lack of career opportunities and were aware of their own powers being passed to the mendicants, as had happened specifically when Innocent IV who was sympathetic to them was replaced by Alexander IV who fulfilled his role as protector of the Franciscans. William of St. Amour (c.1200–1272 AD), one of the successful petitioners to Innocent IV, became the mouthpiece for the opposition against the mendicants, launching a public attack in his sermon '*Qui amat periculum*'²⁴² and later, in 1256 AD, writing his famous treatise, '*De periculis novissimorum temporum*'.²⁴³ William accused the mendicant friars, who however are not specified, of the whole list of vices of 2Tim. 3²⁴⁴ and warned, the danger is at our doors, and it is the duty of the bishops to avert it. In order that those 'impostors' and 'pseudo-preachers', were to be more easily detected, William presented forty-one signs, by which they could be recognised. This treatise made an enormous impression, attracting written opposition from mendicants including Thomas and Albert, and after being examined by a curial committee, Alexander IV, in 1257 AD ordered it to be burned and William to be excommunicated.

The seculars feared for their own livelihoods, and that mendicant power in the university would move the emphasis away from academic to monastic development, although in practice, at the high end of the ladder, mendicant scholars such as Aquinas were financed and thereby released to develop academic study. When considering his use of the power distinction, 'Thomist scholars seemed convinced that, Thomas used the distinction

²⁴² William of St. Amour, 'Qui amat periculum', Edward Brown (ed.), *Fasciculus rerum expetendarum* (1690), II, 51; Guil. a S. Amore, *Opera omnia quae reperiri potuerunt* (Constance, 1632), 491. See L. Oliger, 'Mendicant Friars', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1911).

²⁴³ William of St. Amour, 'De periculis novissimorum temporum', *Opera omnia*, op. cit., 17-72; Edward Brown (ed.), op. cit. 11, 18-41, here under a false title.

²⁴⁴ 2Tim. 3: 1-2, '*hoc autem scito quod in novissimis diebus instabunt tempora periculosa et erunt homines se ipsos amantes cupidi elati superbi blasphemii parentibus inoboedientes ingrati scelesti ...*'

sparingly since it did not blend well with Thomas' view of the inherent rationality of the created order, nor with the close association that Thomas presumably saw between the created order and the divine nature.'²⁴⁵ However, as Courtenay suggests, the language and in particular the concept of the distinction between absolute and ordained power is more common than previously thought, and likewise, Moonan notes that the distinction featured in the first work that Aquinas was entitled to put forward in his own right as a Paris Master,²⁴⁶ and so must have been at the head of his thinking. Both list thirty or more occasions when Thomas used the distinction.²⁴⁷

In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas distinguishes what can possibly happen from what is just hypothetical:

Accordingly we should state that by his absolute power God can do other things than those he foresaw that he would do and pre-ordained to do. Nevertheless nothing can come to pass that he has not foreseen and pre-ordained.²⁴⁸

The idea of foresight is introduced as a constraint on absolute power as in the text from Albert stated above, however, while Albert speaks ambiguously of different things being foreseen as a possibility, Thomas more clearly states there is nothing actualised, that is not foreseen, or foreknown, and pre-ordained. In this passage, although there is distinction in power, and there is the potential for unrealised possibilities, the things that are contained by the absolute power that are not ordained could never happen. What has been ordained is a subset of everything that could happen, but in the reality of what actually does happen, there is no difference between what is and what could be, and so this

²⁴⁵ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 88.

²⁴⁶ See L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 229.

²⁴⁷ See L. Moonan, 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Divine Power', in *the Atti of the congress Thomasso d'Aquino nel suo VII centenario* (1974), 3 (1977), 366-407. Also W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 88.

²⁴⁸ Thom. Aqu., *S.Th.* I, q. 25, a. 5, (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888), 297: '*Secundum hoc ergo dicendum est quod Deus potest alia facere de potentia absoluta quam quae praescivit et praeordinavit se facturum. Non tamen potest esse quod aliqua faciat quae non praesciverit et praeordinaverit se facturum.*' Text and trans. in Thomas Gilby, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Blackfriars edition), vol. 5 (London, 1967), 173.

description of unrealised power is therefore comparable with the potential inferred by the *potuit sed noluit* idea of Augustine.

Interestingly, Thomas develops this idea of absolute power that remains unrealised:

It remains therefore, that God is called omnipotent because he can do all things that are possible absolutely. For a thing is said to be possible or impossible absolutely according to the relation in which the very terms stand one to another, possible, if the predicate is not compatible with the subject as that Socrates sits; and absolutely impossible when the predicate is altogether incompatible with the subject, as, for instance, that man is a donkey.²⁴⁹

This is not just emphasising possibility or otherwise, but presenting the strategic role of terms in providing the conditions such that any predication must be compatible with the subject and so for God, everything is possible within this constraint and everything else is impossible. The principle of contradiction states that everything is possible that does not involve something that is impossible such that God, even in *potentia absoluta*, could not make a triangle with anything other than three lines.²⁵⁰ Aquinas presents the case for an infinite number of possibilities but these are not unconditional and the conditions are in the realm of things, rather than being connected with the nature of God or any question of power. As far as God is concerned, contradictions do not exist and so are not capable of being done and there is no lacking in power if the action is not in mind to be done. God's power is extended to all being, only excluding 'what fights against the logic of being', namely 'non-being',²⁵¹ or as with Albert, a man and an ass. God could not make something that at the same time 'is' and 'is not' and so with either absolute or ordained

²⁴⁹ Thom. Aqu., *S.Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3, (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888), 293: '*Relinquitur igitur quod Deus dicatur omnipotens, quia potest omnia possibilis absolute, quod est alter modus dicendi possibile. Dicitur autem aliquid possibile vel impossibile absolute, ex habitudine terminorum: possibile quidem, quia praedicatum non repugnat subiecto, ut Socratem sedere; impossibile vero absolute, quia praedicatum repugnat subiecto, ut hominem esse asinum.*' Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1947). See R. Torretti, *Creative Understanding* (1990), 253.

²⁵⁰ See Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* I, d. 42, q. 2, a. 2, sol., (ed.) Mandonnet (1929), 991.

²⁵¹ Thom. Aqu., *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 25, a. 3 (1888): '*nihil autem opponitur rationi entis, nisi non ens.*' Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1947).

power God could not make contradictory things happen simultaneously. No contradiction could happen in the present, and the future is ordained, but God could have acted differently in the past, although the fact that God has overseen and therefore ordained what has happened, means that actions cannot be reversed. Aquinas used this principle, later to be adopted by Ockham, to provide answers to different issues including those involving time and the problem of the fallen virgin. Thomas proposes God cannot do what is impossible, *per accidens*, i.e. by circumstances and, even more so, something impossible in itself. He refers to Jerome's letter to Eustochium to say God cannot bring about that which in the past has not happened, and parallels Albert's reference to Jerome and Aristotle, although he also adds the reference to Augustine's '*Contra Faustum Manichaeum*' which was also used by Alexander of Hales when treating divine omnipotence.²⁵² He also introduces the fallen virgin to a quodlibet by contrasting her plight in the light of *Luke's* text,²⁵³ and here, the answer to the question is, 'yes'. As Thomas continues, God can recreate her mind through grace and her physical integrity through a miracle, however, he could not undo the cause, namely that the virgin had sexual intercourse with a man, as God could not undo [the past] such that 'an event did not happen'.²⁵⁴ It is therefore within God's absolute power to restore the virgin although to do this as if intercourse never happened would imply a contradiction, and so in practice it is only possible for all the effects of the cause to change if they were ordained to be so. In the following question of this quodlibet, Thomas deals with the question, 'whether God could sin, if he wished to do so'.²⁵⁵ Thomas, while acknowledging that it should be possible for God to do anything said that, in practice, God only acts within his will but while creation is subject to God's will, God acts according to his nature and his will follows this. Aquinas reasoned that everything God wants to do he is able to do, but when considered the other way round, it is not right that God wants to do everything he is able to do. He uses the illustration of a runner who needs to wish to run as an antecedent before

²⁵² See Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* I, d. 42, q. 2, a. 2, arg. 3, (ed.) Mandonnet (1929), 990.

²⁵³ *Luke* 1:37, '*quia non erit impossibile apud Deum omne verbum.*'

²⁵⁴ See Thom. Aqu., *Quaestiones quodlibetales* V, q. 2, a. 1, (ed.) R. Spiazzi (Rome, 1949).

²⁵⁵ Thom. Aqu., *Quaestiones quodlibetales* V, q. 2, a. 2: (ed.) R. Spiazzi (Rome, 1949).

being able to run. With this condition in place, because God has no desire to sin, meaning no will to sin, he is therefore not able to sin.

The clearest reference by Thomas to the power distinction is in his comments on Lombard's *Sentences*,²⁵⁶ although not when covering the *Book 1* distinctions on power, but during a *Book 3* discussion on:

Whether the Father is able to assume flesh, and whether the Holy Spirit is likewise able.²⁵⁷

Distinction one, question two begins with Thomas presenting five points of enquiry.²⁵⁸

U1: whether one of the Persons can assume flesh while another does not;

U2: if this is so, why the Son assumed flesh rather than [another of the Persons];

U3: whether the Father or the Holy Spirit was or is able to assume flesh;

²⁵⁶ I am grateful to Joseph Haggerty from the Aquinas Institute for the study of Sacred Doctrine, Lander, Wyoming, for his work on translating this passage and help with devising the system for classifying the different issues within the text. I have adapted the translation such that the points of enquiry, beginning '*utrum*', have therefore been prefixed with a **U**, objections are prefixed **Obj**, and **Sc** has been used to identify the reasons, *sed contra*, why the initial question could be possible. The categories of the four-fold model presented by Thomas are prefixed with **C** and concluding remarks on the initial five points each begin, and so are prefixed, with **Ad**.

²⁵⁷ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, (ed.) Moos (Paris, 1956), 28: '*Utrum Pater vel Spiritus sanctus potuerint vel possint assumere carnem.*' See also d. 1, q. 2, a. 4, (ed.) Moos (Paris, 1956), 41: '*quod natura assumpta a tribus personis sit una unitate singularis naturae non est impossibile, loquendo de potentia absoluta, quamvis non sit congruum secundum ordinem divinae sapientiae.*'

²⁵⁸ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, resp. (1956), 28: '*Deinde quaeritur de assumente carnem; et circa hoc quaeruntur quinque; Primo, utrum una persona possit assumere carnem alia non assumente; Secundo, si sic, quare magis filius carnem assumpsit; Tertio, utrum pater vel spiritus sanctus potuerunt vel possint carnem assumere; Quarto, si sic, utrum potuerunt eadem numero humanam naturam assumere; Quinto, utrum una persona possit duas numero humanas naturas assumere.*'

U4: if so, whether they were able to assume the numerically same human nature;

U5: whether one of the Persons is able to assume human natures which are two in number.

These 5 points of enquiry are followed by 5 objections:

Obj1: It seems that the Father was not able to assume flesh. For, as Anselm says, that which is in the least degree unbefitting is impossible for God. But if the Father were to assume flesh, something unbefitting would follow: namely, there would be many sons in the Trinity, something which would tend to a certain confusion of the Persons. Consequently, the Father was not able to assume flesh.

Obj2: Also, opposites cannot be joined in the same thing, not even through a miracle. But there is in the Father a certain property called innascibility, according to which he is said not to be from another; to this property nascibility is opposed. The Father, therefore, was not able to be born of the virgin, which he would be said to be, if he were to assume flesh.

Obj3: Again, as it is said in the text, the mission of the Son is the Incarnation itself. But it is not befitting for the Father to be sent, as was maintained in Book I [*Lombard's Sentences*]; therefore he cannot be incarnate.

Obj4: Again, the best things which can happen are always to be hoped for from him who is infinite in mercy. But since the whole world was made better through the incarnation of one of the Persons, it will be improved all the more if the Father should be incarnate as well. If it is possible for the Father to be incarnate, therefore, one must hope for it, just as the ancient patriarchs hoped for the incarnation of the Son—which is entirely absurd.

Obj5: Furthermore, God's power does not exceed his will, since each is infinite. But the Father never willed to be incarnate; therefore neither is he able to be incarnate.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3 (1956), 35: '*Videtur quod pater carnem assumere non potuerit. Quia, ut dicit Anselmus, minimum inconueniens est Deo*

Having presented five reasons why the Father or Holy Spirit could not become incarnate Thomas then highlights three ideas against, *sed contra*, these five, why it should be possible:

Sc1: But to the contrary, every necessity and impossibility is subjected to God, as Anselm says. But nothing is impossible for the One to whose will every impossibility is subjected. Therefore it is not impossible for the Father to be incarnate.

Sc2: Also, the joining of things equally distant is equally possible. But human nature is equally distant from the three persons, being at an infinite distance from any one of them you please. If the Son was able to assume [flesh], therefore, the Father is able to as well.

Sc3: Furthermore, anything of dignity which befits the Son befits the Father as well. But to be able to assume flesh is something of dignity in the Son; therefore it must also be attributed to the Father.²⁶⁰

impossibile. Sed si pater carnem assumeret, sequeretur inconveniens, ut scilicet essent in Trinitate plures filii, quod in confusionem quamdam vergeret personarum. Ergo pater carnem assumere non potuit. Item opposita non possunt jungi in eodem, etiam per miraculum. Sed in patre est quaedam proprietas, quae dicitur innascibilitas, secundum quam dicitur non esse ex alio, cui nascibilitas opponitur. Ergo non potuit pater de virgine nasci, quod diceretur, si carnem assumeret. Item, ut in littera dicitur, filii missio, est ipsa incarnatio. Sed patri non convenit mitti, ut in primo libro habitum est. Ergo nec incarnari potest. Item, ab eo qui est infinitae misericordiae, semper optima expectanda sunt quae contingere possunt. Sed cum totus mundus per incarnationem unius personae melioratus sit, si etiam pater incarnaretur, multo amplius meliorabitur. Ergo si possibile est patrem incarnari, hoc expectandum est, sicut et antiqui patres incarnationem filii expectaverunt: quod est omnino absurdum. Praeterea, non est major Dei potentia quam sua voluntas, cum utrumque sit infinitum. Sed pater nunquam voluit incarnari. Ergo nec incarnari potest. Praeterea, non est major Dei potentia quam sua voluntas, cum utrumque sit infinitum. Sed pater nunquam voluit incarnari. Ergo nec incarnari potest.'

²⁶⁰ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3 (1956), 36: '*Sed contra, sicut dicit Anselmus, omnis necessitas et impossibilitas Deo est subjecta. Sed ei nihil est impossibile, cujus voluntati omnis impossibilitas subditur. Ergo patrem incarnari non est impossibile. Item, eorum quae aequae distant, aequae possibilis est conjunctio. Sed humana natura*

The first suggestion emphasises that everything is subject to the will of God, including whatever may have been perceived as being impossible and this in accordance with the scriptures claiming that nothing is impossible for God. Suggestions two and three are based on the idea of equality within the persons of the Trinity in that all three persons of the Trinity are the same distance from mankind and all three possess the same dignity. And so with both sides of the argument in place Thomas begins his solution by presenting the power distinction relative to the initial question:

When something is ascribed to the power of God, therefore, one must consider whether it is attributed to his power considered in itself, or in its order to his wisdom and foreknowledge and will. If the former, then he is said to be able from his absolute power; if the latter, then he is said to be able from his ordained power.²⁶¹

The distinction in power is based on whether something is attributed to divine power as just the power in itself or it is attributed in relation to the wisdom, foreknowledge and will of God. Thomas then presents a fourfold sifting model of the things which he says can be attributed to the divine power, although it should be noted that the things of the first category cannot be attributed to even absolute power.²⁶² These four categories, each introduced by the term, *quaedam*, because they refer to ‘certain things’, however are not without further complication as categories one, two and three all sub-divide. Category one contains two aspects which God cannot do even out of absolute power, while

aequaliter distat a tribus personis: distat enim a qualibet in infinitum. Ergo si potuit eam filius assumere, potest et pater. Praeterea, quidquid dignitatis convenit filio, convenit et patri. Sed posse assumere carnem est dignitatis in filio. Ergo et patri attribuendum est.’

²⁶¹ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, resp. (1956), 36: ‘*quando potentiae divinae aliquid ascribitur, utrum attribuatur potentiae secundum se consideratae; tunc enim dicitur posse illud de potentia absoluta: vel attribuatur sibi in ordine ad sapientiam et praescientiam et voluntatem ejus: tunc enim dicitur posse illud de potentia ordinata.*’

²⁶² As Haggerty notes, “‘Can be attributed’ (*attribui possunt*) is in this sentence understood in the broadest sense: one could make the statement, regardless of its truth or falsehood. In the very next sentence, “‘are . . . attributed’ (*attribuitur*) is understood in the narrower sense of being *truly* attributed; such attribution is not possible in **C1**. Perhaps St. Thomas is enjoying a little private joke (about the mind’s absolute and ordained powers of attribution) at our expense.’

categories two and three are split according to if the *quaedam* are being considered in the light of a certain condition, namely the will of God:

C1: Certain things are not attributed to His power, even as absolutely considered. These things he is, simply speaking, not able to do, to suffer (**C1a**), for example, and to make contradictories coexist (**C1b**).

C1a: By that which “tends to the defect of a power,” on the other hand, I mean those things which entail the possibility of a power. For it is from a defect in an active power of resisting that it can happen that something undergoes corruption or division, or anything of this sort; thus softness is said to be a natural powerlessness in consequence of being easily divisible. It is for this reason that we do not say that God, in his divine nature, has the power of suffering or dying, or anything of this sort, just as we do not say that he has the power of being powerless.

C1b: I say “something in itself” because the joining of an affirmation and a negation is nothing, and that which is said to be man and not-man, taken together and as if by the power of a single statement, produces no intellectual apprehension; hence the power of God does not extend so far as to allow there to be an affirmation and a negation together. The same is true of all things which involve a contradiction.²⁶³

God could not do anything that suggested there was a defect in his power because nothing about God’s nature points to weakness or impotence. Likewise, God could not make

²⁶³ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, resp. (1956), 37: ‘*Quaedam enim nec ipsi potentiae absolutae attribuuntur; unde simpliciter dicendum est, Deum ea non posse, sicut pati, et contradictoria simul esse. Dico autem in defectum potentiae vergere quae passionem potentiae important: ex defectu enim potentiae activae ad resistendum contingit quod aliquid vel corrumpatur vel dividatur, vel aliquid huiusmodi; unde et mollities impotentia naturalis dicitur propter facilem divisibilitatem; et ideo non dicimus Deum in natura divinitatis posse pati vel mori, vel aliquid huiusmodi; sicut non dicimus eum posse esse impotentem. Dico autem in se aliquid esse: quia conjunctio affirmationis et negationis nihil est, nec aliquem intellectum generat quod dicitur homo et non homo simul acceptum, quasi in vi unius dictionis: et ideo potentia Dei ad hoc se non extendit, ut affirmatio et negatio sint simul: et eadem ratio est de omnibus quae contradictionem includunt.*’

contradictions coexist, or do anything that involved a contradiction because contradictions amount to nothing; not to something. With the things that can't even be done by absolute power sorted, Thomas moves on to discuss how everything else is attributed within the realm of absolute power:

Since God's absolute power is infinite, everything (**C2 – C4**) which is something in itself and which does not tend to the defect of a power must of necessity be attributed to it.²⁶⁴

Categories two and three refer to the power of God as power in itself such that even when the thing being considered would not fit within his wisdom and will, (as long as it passes the test of category one), God would still be able to do it, but only out of absolute power.²⁶⁵ These two categories both subdivide according to whether they are considered conditionally, **2cc**, **3cc** or not conditionally, **2ncc**, **3ncc**:

C2: For among these things (**C2cc**), some are inseparably joined to something which is in itself repugnant to the divine wisdom and goodness, such as sinning, lying, and things of this sort; these (**C2ncc**), we also say that God is not able to do.

Certain others (**C2**) are of themselves repugnant to His wisdom and goodness, and (**C2ncc**) we do not say that God is able to do them, except (**C2cc**) under a condition - namely, if he should will it. For it is not unbefitting that the antecedent of a true conditional be impossible.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, resp. (1956), 36: '*Ipsi ergo potentiae absolutae, cum infinita sit, necesse est attribuere omne id quod in se est aliquid, et quod in defectum potentiae non vergit.*'

²⁶⁵ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, resp. (1956), 37: '*quando autem potentia se extendit quantum in se est ad illud quod sibi attribuitur, quamvis non habeat ejus sapientia et voluntas ut ita fiat, tunc dicitur posse illud de potentia absoluta tantum.*'

²⁶⁶ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, resp. (1956), 37: '*quia in his sunt quaedam quae habent aliquid in se divinae sapientiae et bonitati repugnans inseparabiliter conjunctum, ut peccare, mentiri, et hujusmodi; et etiam ista dicimus Deum non posse: Quaedam vero ex se sapientiae et bonitati ejus repugnant; et ista non dicimus Deum posse nisi sub conditione, scilicet si vellet; non enim inconueniens est ut in conditionali vera antecedens sit impossibile.*'

There are certain things that are repugnant to God's wisdom and goodness and there are also things that have joined themselves to something repugnant to divine wisdom and goodness. In these cases God is not able to do them, however, a further constraint is added to the text here by Thomas proposing that although something in itself might hold a repugnancy, when placed under the condition that it is willed by God to be done, then, God would be able to do it. This proposal is generalised with an explanation confirming that although the event or thing might be impossible before it is put through the conditional test, this does not necessarily mean that it is an *inconveniens*, i.e. unbefitting or inappropriate to God, if God wishes to do it.

C3: There are certain others (**C3**) which are in no way unbefitting the divine wisdom of themselves, but merely do not befit some ordination of His foreknowledge, something which God, according to his will, has established or foreseen. An example: that a man's head should be his lowest part. A thing of this sort (**C3ncc**), God is able to do, since he is able to establish a different order in things, according to which that would be fitting which now - according to the order which is, in fact, present in things - seems unbefitting.

Again (**C3**), certain others are not repugnant of themselves, but only due to something external to them, and (**C3ncc**), it must be conceded absolutely that God is able to do such things from His absolute power. They cannot be denied [to His power] except (**C3cc**) under a condition — namely, it might be said that He is not able **if** it is repugnant to His will.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3 (1956), 37: '*Quaedam vero sunt quae de se non habent inconvenientiam ad divinam sapientiam, sed solum ad ordinem aliquem suae praescientiae, quem Deus in rebus statuit vel praevidit, secundum suam voluntatem, ut quod caput hominis sit inferius; et haec Deus potest facere, quia potest statuere alium ordinem in rebus secundum quem sit conveniens quod nunc secundum istum ordinem qui rebus inest, inconveniens videtur. Quaedam vero de se repugnantiam non habent, sed solum ab exteriori; et talia absolute concedendum est Deum posse de potentia absoluta; nec sunt neganda nisi sub conditione, scilicet ut dicatur: non potest, si voluntati ejus repugnat.*'

In this category Thomas addresses things that are not repugnant in themselves and within divine wisdom but are not done because they are not within the will of God according the present order of things. God is able to do these things because what is unbefitting in the present order might be fitting in a different order. When the condition of being within the will of God is applied then, whatever the order, if the thing is repugnant to the will of God then it could not be done. As with category two, the condition considered is the will of God, but in reverse manner, because in category three God's will is the exception being the restriction whereas in category two it is the exception to the restriction. In categories two and three Aquinas applies the thought from **Obj5** by demonstrating God's will and power are both infinite and work in tandem.

C4: Finally, **(C4)** there are certain things which are attributed to His power in the sense that they conform to His will and wisdom; these God must be said to be able, simply speaking, to do, and to be in no way incapable of doing. Now, when **(C4)** something which God wills to do and which his wisdom holds that he **do** is attributed to this power considered absolutely, then he is said to be able according to his ordained power.²⁶⁸

From within God's absolute power, if something is within his wisdom and will, then it will be done out of God's ordained power. And so now, Thomas is able to apply his sifting process to the question:

For the Father to be incarnate, therefore, does not belong among those things **(C1)** which are not subject to the absolute power of God, since it neither implies a contradiction, nor does incarnation involve any defect in the incarnate Person - the Father and the Son are of the same dignity, and the same ratio of personhood is in both. Nor does it belong among those things **(C2)** which of themselves involve something unbefitting. However, it does belong among those things **(C3)** which involve unbefittingness on account of another ordination established by

²⁶⁸ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, resp. (1956), 37: '*Quaedam vero sunt quae attribuuntur potentiae, ita quod voluntati et sapientiae ejus congruunt; et haec simpliciter dicendum est Deum posse, et nullo modo ea non posse ... Huic autem potentiae absolute consideratae quando attribuitur aliquid quod vult facere et sapientia sua habet ut faciat, tunc dicitur posse illud secundum potentiam ordinatam.*'

the wisdom of God. That the Son be incarnate, on the other hand, belongs to (C4) the fourth category [of things which can be attributed to the divine power]. And therefore it must be conceded without qualification that the Father was able - speaking of His absolute power - to assume flesh, and the Holy Spirit likewise.²⁶⁹

The incarnation of the Father, Son or Spirit all pass through categories one and two. However, although there is not an intrinsic repugnancy to the Father, (or the Spirit), taking flesh, it was not within the divine will, which is the essential condition to pass through category three. As stated in **Obj3** and **Obj4** it was the Son who was to be sent and this was the best option and therefore the Son to become flesh meets category four. Here Thomas repeats the point that is critical to the development of the power distinction, in that it was therefore possible for the Father to become incarnate, because it might be fitting, according to the will of God, in a different order. This thought is further emphasised as Thomas applies his solution to the initial five points of enquiry:

Ad1: To the first, it must be said that it is impossible that God should do something, and that this be unfitting. However, He is able to make it so that something which is unbefitting according to one order is made befitting according to another order. Thus the Father is able to assume flesh by forming it in the same manner in which he formed the body of man from earth, so that the name “Son” would not belong to the Father. Nor would it even be repugnant of itself if the Father were called “Son,” since these names would be attributed according to different natures.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, (1956), 38: ‘*Dicendum est ergo, quod patrem incarnari, non est de illis quae potentiae Dei absolutae non subduntur; cum neque contradictionem implicet, neque defectum aliquem incarnatio in persona incarnata ponat: est enim eadem dignitas patris et filii, et ratio eadem personalitatis in utroque: nec est etiam de illis quae ex se inconvenientiam habent: sed est de illis quae habent inconvenientiam propter ordinem alium a Dei sapientia institutum. Sed filium incarnari est in quarto ordine. Et ideo simpliciter concedendum est quod pater potuit carnem assumere, et similiter spiritus sanctus, loquendo de potentia absoluta.*’

²⁷⁰ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3 (1956), 38: ‘*Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod hoc est impossibile, ut aliquid faciat Deus, et hoc sit inconveniens; sed tamen potest facere ut illud quod modo est inconveniens secundum unum ordinem, secundum alium*

While confirming it is impossible for God to do anything unbefitting, the question of unbefittingness could be different in another order. Thomas adds his thoughts on how the Father might become flesh such that it would not be unfitting or contain a repugnancy in that he could form flesh as he formed Adam and therefore not be born of a virgin. Likewise names attributed would reflect the different natures in the new order. In his response to **Obj2** Aquinas shows how the Father becoming flesh need not contain an opposite:

Ad2: To the second, it must be said that opposites cannot be in the same thing in the same respect, but nothing prevents them from being in it in diverse respects. Consequently, although innascibility does belong to the Father according to his divine nature, birth could nonetheless be in the same Father according to his human nature - just as it is in the Son to be, according to his divine nature, the father of the virgin of whom, according to his human nature, he is the son.²⁷¹

This is about the difference in the divine perspective of attributes according to the human and divine natures of the Father and the Son. Nascibility and innascibility are opposite but only when considered from the same perspective. In his divine nature, the Father does not possess the capability to be born of the virgin. However not being able to be born is not part of human nature and so, in respect of human nature, there is no opposite involved. It is possible for the Father to be innascible in his divine nature and yet nascible in his human nature. Therefore, according to human nature, the Father could be born, in the same way that the Son in his human nature was born of the virgin, and likewise in his divine nature, the Son is innascible, the father of the virgin of whom, in his human nature, he becomes the son.

ordinem fiat conveniens; sicut potest carnem hoc modo formando assumere, sicut corpus viri de terra formavit: sic enim filii nomen patri non conveniret: nec etiam si pater filius diceretur, esset de se repugnantiam habens, cum secundum diversas naturas haec sibi attribuerentur.'

²⁷¹ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3 (1956), 38: '*Ad secundum dicendum, quod secundum idem non possunt opposita eidem in esse; sed secundum diversa nihil prohibet. Unde quamvis patri conveniat innascibilitas secundum naturam divinam, posset tamen eidem inesse nativitas secundum naturam humanam; sicut filio secundum naturam divinam filius.*'

Ad3: To the third, it must be said that the incarnation of the Son is called “mission” because the Son is from another. If the Father were to be incarnate, however, His incarnation could not be called “mission.” In like manner, the ostension of the Holy Spirit in the dove is called his visible “mission,” but the ostension of the Father in the sound of the voice is not called a “mission.”²⁷²

The emphasis here is on the contrast between being the one sending and the one being sent. If the Father were to become incarnate then he would become the one sent, but in this case there would be no difference between sending and sent, hence, the Father has not become incarnate. The Son and the Holy Spirit both have that sense of being sent out and even when the voice of God the Father is heard, it is not a voice that is different from that of the Father, but it is the very voice of him. Again, there is no difference between speaker and spoken, hence, the argument that the Father is not the one incarnate.²⁷³

Ad4: To the fourth, it must be said that the three Persons are not of greater goodness than one alone. For this reason, there would be no more of a gain to the universe by the incarnation of all of the Persons than by the incarnation of only one; hence it would be superfluous. Consequently, although it is possible for the Father to be incarnate, it is not to be hoped for.²⁷⁴

As all three persons of the Trinity possess goodness without measure, then three times infinity is still infinity and so nothing is added by all three becoming incarnate and

²⁷² Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3 (1956), 38: ‘*Ad tertium dicendum, quod incarnatio filii dicitur missio, quia filius ab alio est. Si autem pater incarnaretur, ejus incarnatio missio dici non posset: sicut ostensio spiritus sancti in columba, missio visibilis ipsius dicitur; non autem ostensio patris in sono vocis.*’

²⁷³ Mark 1:10-1: ‘*et statim ascendens de aqua vidit apertos caelos et Spiritum tamquam columbam descendentem et manentem in ipso et vox facta est de caelis tu es Filius meus dilectus in te conplacui.*’

²⁷⁴ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3 (1956), 38: ‘*Ad quartum dicendum, quod tres personae non sunt majoris bonitatis quam una tantum; et ideo nihil plus universo accresceret per incarnationem omnium personarum, quam de incarnatione unius tantum; unde fuisset superfluum; et ideo quamvis sit possibile patrem incarnari, non tamen est expectandum.*’

therefore, the death of the Son is enough for atonement. **Ad3** and **Ad4** are dealt with above in that they present why the Father, (or Spirit), could not become flesh in the current order, because the Father is the sending one and the Son is the sent one and so for the Father to send the Son is within the wisdom and will of God.²⁷⁵ It was the Son who was anticipated and the Son whose blood was sufficient as the atoning sacrifice and so there was no need for any other Person of the trinity to become incarnate, or all three.

Ad5: To the fifth it must be said that the power of God is no greater in respect of essence than is his will, but it nonetheless extends to more objects. If God does not will something, therefore, it does not follow that he is not able to do it by his absolute power.²⁷⁶

As mentioned above, Thomas again emphasises how the absolute power of God is more extensive, or in terms of things, there is potentiality for more than his ordained power actualises, even if with respect to essence, God's potentiality and actuality are the same. Thomas has presented the power distinction in this discussion by applying an illustration to his own sifting model. Having established there are things, which are effectively nothing or repugnant to God's wisdom and will and therefore not possible in the present order, *de potentia ordinata*, he shows that, in a different order that may be possible, *de potentia absoluta*. The absolute power of God is enough to accomplish all that is ordained now and all that may be ordained under a different order. The language Thomas uses is taken up by later users of the distinction and importantly the idea that God could act differently outside of the current order, re-emerges in a political twist to the distinction. Elsewhere in *Sentences* III Thomas further explored the possibility that God could have acted differently out of absolute power, such that, God could have embodied a woman²⁷⁷ or even a non-rational (i.e. non-human) animal,²⁷⁸ and in other texts, God could have

²⁷⁵ See 1John 2:2, 4:10.

²⁷⁶ Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3 (1956), 39: '*Ad quintum dicendum, quod potentia Dei non est major quantum ad essentiam quam voluntas; tamen ad plura objecta se extendit potentia quam voluntas; unde non sequitur, si aliquid Deus non vult, quod illud absoluta potentia non possit.*'

²⁷⁷ See Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 12, q. 3, a. 2 (1956), 390; see similarly of Roland of Cremona (without the distinction terms *potentia absoluta/ordinata*), *Summae Magistri Rolandi Cremonensis*, A. Cortesi (ed.), III (Bergamo, 1962), 44-9.

²⁷⁸ See Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 2, q. 1, a. 1 (1956), 55.

effected salvation other than through the incarnation,²⁷⁹ reveal someone's damnation to him,²⁸⁰ change the will of a demon to good²⁸¹ and even annihilate everything created.²⁸² In another lengthy discussion, this time from his *Quaestiones disputatae*, Thomas uses the negative situation of being unable to walk when applying the power distinction to illustrate how God's ordering of things causes a limitation on absolute power. With a broken foot one is completely unable to walk but if walking is not possible because of the prevailing condition of being seated, then the inability is termed, *ex suppositone*.

Thomas states:

For even as the divine goodness is made manifest through these things that are and through this order of things, so could it be made manifest through other creatures and another order. Therefore the divine will without prejudice to his goodness, justice and wisdom, can extend to other things besides those which he has made. And this is where they erred, for they thought that the created order was commensurate with divine goodness, as if apart from that order divine goodness could not have been expressed. It is clear then that God absolutely can do otherwise than he has done. Since, however, he cannot make contradictories to be true at the same time, it can be said *ex suppositione* that God cannot make other things besides those he has made; for if we suppose that he does not wish to do otherwise, or that he foresaw that he would not do otherwise, as long as the supposition stands, he cannot do otherwise, understood in the composite, not the divided sense.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ See Thom. Aqu., *Contra errores Graecorum* I, c. 16, (ed.) Leon (Rome, 1969).

²⁸⁰ Thom. Aqu., *De Veritate*, q. 23, art. 8 ad 2 (ed.) Leon (Rome, 1975).

²⁸¹ Thom. Aqu., *De Malo*, 16, art. 5 ad 13, (ed.) Marietti (1953).

²⁸² Thom. Aqu., *Quodlibetales* IV, q. 3, art. 4c, (ed.) R. Spiazzi (Rome, 1949).

²⁸³ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 5, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 19b-20a: '*Sicut enim manifestatur divina bonitas per has res quae nunc sunt et per hunc rerum ordinem, ita potest manifestari per alias creaturas et alio modo ordinatas: et ideo divina voluntas absque praeiudicio bonitatis, iustitiae et sapientiae, potest se extendere in alia quam quae facit. Et in hoc fuerunt decepti errantes: aestimaverunt enim ordinem creaturarum esse quasi commensuratum divinae bonitatis quasi absque eo esse non posset. Patet ergo quod absolute Deus potest facere alia quam quae fecit. Sed quia ipse non potest facere quod*

Not being able to walk because of a broken foot does not involve choice but simple inability, and so with walking and not walking being opposites, and therefore a contradiction, then this is not question of power. Alternatively, not walking because of remaining seated implies a self-chosen restriction or condition. In this passage, what God is able to do is not restricted by goodness, justice and wisdom, as Thomas points out, it is that all that we know of God's goodness, justice and wisdom is a reflection of the current order and not their full extent. Those who 'erred' refers to the philosophers, such as Aristotle, who said that God only acts out of necessity and theologians, such as Peter Almar, (possibly Abelard), who say God cannot act outside of divine justice and wisdom. Courtenay explains that, 'as with others of his generation, Thomas identified *potentia ordinata* with the total divine plan, but he did not identify divine wisdom with the present order of things. God's goodness, wisdom and justice could have been expressed through some other pre-ordained system. The present order, therefore, is a product of the divine will; it is not the only and necessary product of the divine nature and wisdom... Other theoretically possible arrangements or orders about which Thomas speculated reveal the extent of divine freedom and the degrees to which the present order is not a full reflection of divine wisdom and justice.'²⁸⁴ In remaining faithful to his created order, God has set conditions which in effect apply a restriction such that we experience his attributes in the limited sense of his ordained rather than absolute power. Thomas uses the distinction here to show that God could have acted other than he has done, in that other options were possible in the past, though there is no reference in this passage to applying this principle to present or future events.

On the whole, Thomas makes a solid contribution to the debate, and his pointer towards the idea that what is not actualised in the present order does not mean, with the appropriate conditions, that it does not become possible in a different order, prepared the ground for more radical interpretations of the distinction. As with Albert, Thomas is seen as both promoting philosophical ideas while upholding the primacy of theology. Steenbergen

contradictoria sint simul vera, ex suppositione potest dici, quod Deus non potest alia facere quam quae fecit: supposito enim quod ipse non velit alia facere, vel quod praesciverit se non alia facturum, non potest alia facere, ut intelligatur composite, non divisim.' Trans. here and following by the English Dominican Friars, the Newman Press, 1952, reprint of 1932.

²⁸⁴ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 89-90.

notes that Mandonnet describes Thomas as ‘the very friendly but independent judge’ of Aristotle and concludes that, ‘he [Thomas], pays great attention to the Graeco-Arabic doctrines, and refutes them with care.’²⁸⁵ Both Thomas and Albert utilised Graeco-Arabic ideas as philosophical tools to arrive at different solutions from Aristotle such that the world has not just proceeded from God in a necessarianistic order but that God chose the effects that order the world and has the power to change the order of things. This notion became essential to the ensuing theological thinking that readily employed the power distinction to consider the possibility of change to the present order. By applying philosophical methods in a charged climate where theology and philosophy were seen as harmonious by some, distinct by others or maybe just either helpful or dangerous companions, the works of Albert and Thomas received a mixed response. Some regarded these two prominent Dominicans as being supportive of this Graeco-Arabic philosophical permeation and yet others regarded them as being more cautious about such philosophical developments. Although different conclusions are possible, they certainly incorporated philosophical ideas when utilising the power distinction to present their theological ideas and effectively built the kind of solid platform that Eckhart relished jumping off to take his followers into the unknown.

Church politics, canon law and more trouble in Paris

The emerging university system and developing philosophical and theological study, supported by mendicant finance, saw various new treatments to the power distinction and the impact of these was not restricted to the world of academia. As legal systems for the Church and state were being devised, the distinction was used as a vehicle for applying canon law and modifying the parameters of ecclesiastical power.

Before the middle of the 13th century, everything that God did, whether by the cause of nature or by miraculous intervention, was generally understood as being within his ordained will, the *potentia ordinata*. Alternatively the *potentia absoluta* was a more abstract area in which there may or may not be things that God could possibly do, but would not actually do. Albert and Thomas had maintained that what God does is within his ordained will, while opening the door of suggestion that God has the power to do more than what is seen in the present order of things. It was Peter of Tarantasia (c.1225–1276

²⁸⁵ F. van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West* (1970), 186, 196.

AD), the first Dominican to become pope, (Innocent V), who moved this idea of possible action into the framework of how God's ordained will is executed in the present order suggesting:

If one considers things from the standpoint of *ordo simpliciter* (i.e. if one identifies *potentia ordinata* with *ordo simpliciter*), then God only acts and can only act *de potentia ordinata*. If, however, one considers things from the standpoint of *ordo ut nunc* (and so defines *potentia ordinata*), then God can do things *de potentia absoluta* that he does not do *de potentia ordinata*.²⁸⁶

Probably without intention, Peter had connected God's ordained actions with intrinsic power in floating the idea that God could act in the present, *ordo ut nunc*, to change the present order. As we have seen previously, intrinsic power was just power unrelated to action or to actions that were hypothetical. As Courtenay comments, 'Peter was obviously sensitive to the problem and wished to affirm that God never acts without order, even in his miracles. Yet his formulation left the impression that actions in contradiction of the present order would be actions *de potentia absoluta*.'²⁸⁷ This questioning of the ordained will of God was not acceptable to everyone and Bonaventure, along with Richard Rufus of Cornwall, recognised the limitations of the power distinction maintaining a position, not unlike Anselm, that emphasised the stability of the present order as the ordained will of God. As Courtenay writes, 'any discussion of what God could do or could have done

²⁸⁶ Peter of Tarantasia, *Sent* I, d. 43, q. 1, a. 4 In *IV Libros Sententiarum Commentaria*, vol. I (Toulouse, 1652; repr. 1964), 360-1, see appendix ii, summarised by W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 91. Courtenay notes that Thomas also distinguished between the present law and total divine will in his *S.Th.* But not in the context of his discussion of omnipotence, see W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 107.

²⁸⁷ W.J. Courtenay, 'The Dialectic of Divine Omnipotence' (1984), 9. Luca Bianchi notes that Peter dedicated this question in his *Sentence Commentary* (I *Sent.* 44, 1, 5: '*Respondeo De universo est loqui dupliciter*'), to the problem of God creating another universe, see L. Bianchi, '1277: A Turning Point in Medieval Philosophy', *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter? Qu'est-ce que la philosophie au Moyen Âge? What is Philosophy in the Middle Ages?* (eds) J.A. Aertsen, A. Speer (Berlin, New York, 1998), 108.

outside the order of his wisdom and justice established, attributed to God the possibility of doing what was not good, just or wise. Since such actions, even theoretically entertained, would contradict the divine nature, they were for Bonaventure not a form of power but of impotence that should not be associated with God.’²⁸⁸

What had been a topic for theological discussion about the nature and actions of sovereign power became a tool in the debate about the practical execution of the current order in the light of canon law and ensuing ecclesiastical power struggles. The power distinction had long been a means of understanding God’s freedom to choose his actions from a larger sphere of possibilities but now the analogy between divine and human volition and capacity was also being considered. As papal power grew during the thirteenth century, so too did the need to clarify the extent of papal authority, not just in relation to the Church, but also the to the state, and so canon lawyers sought a formula that would express the relation of papal power to ecclesiastical law.²⁸⁹ The pope was accountable for upholding the unchangeable foundations of the Church (*status ecclesiae*), however, he also held the plenitude of power (*plenitudo potestatis*), such that he could suspend or alter lesser laws or create a new one if it was deemed to be for the overall good of the Church (*ratio ecclesiae*). This was an adaption of the Roman law principle of *lex digna*, that the prince is bound by the law not by necessity but his own benevolence. As the Prince, or King, being head of state upheld the state, so too the pope upheld the Church. And so, using the terms of the distinction, although the pope was bound, *de potentia ordinata* by existing law, he could *de potentia absoluta*, act outside of the law to implement God’s higher purposes. In this case, it is as if God could use the pope as his agent to alter the present law, in order to bring it into conformity with his general law (*lex aeternalis*).²⁹⁰ The term *plenitudo potestatis* had appeared as early as the 5th century when Leo I formulated the pope to be the unworthy heir of Peter (*indignus haeres beati Petri*)²⁹¹ and so possessing the same commission to be God’s choice as head of the Church in Rome,

²⁸⁸ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 91.

²⁸⁹ See W.J. Courtenay, ‘The Dialectic of Divine Omnipotence’ (1984), 9, also: B. Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility* (1972).

²⁹⁰ See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 92.

²⁹¹ Leo I, *Sermo* 3.4, col. 147: ‘Ille [i.e. beatus Petrus] honoretur...cuius dignitas etiam in indigno haerede non deficit.’ See J. Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought 300 – 1450* (London and New York, 1996), 29.

and its legal executive. Leo, continued in the same sermon, by becoming the first pope to claim these legal powers for himself:

We are (acting) in St Peter's place. (*vice Petri fungimur*),²⁹²

although he did not include the personal merits.

The idea of the *plenitudo potestatis* was about papal supremacy rather than the extent of power but later, in the 12th century, Gratian used it to describe the fulness of papal power in relation to that of the other bishops in the Church. According to Canning it was Gratian's *Decretum* that brought, 'some coherence out of the contradictions in the existing undifferentiated mass of canon law. His (Gratian's) work, which had no official status, became the standard handbook for the study of the subject: a whole school of jurists, known as the 'Decretists', devoted their energies to elucidating the *Decretum*.²⁹³ Also at this time, Bernard of Clairvaux expressed the personal power of the pope:

Others have been called to a part of the care, you to plenitude of power.

The power of others is curtailed by certain limits: yours extends also over those who have accepted power over others.²⁹⁴

This informs the pope that he effectively holds the power to act in ways that are restricted to others. Canning notes that, 'in the second half of the 12th century the body of canon law had been steadily growing through the marked increase in the issuing of papal decretals, especially during the pontificate of Alexander III.'²⁹⁵ The content of canon law was increasing and so likewise the need for law-keeping and law-making, and inevitably a figure at the top of the pyramid of legal executives.

By the 13th century *plenitudo potestatis* was being used to present the pope's supreme legislative authority and Innocent III used the term frequently to describe his supremacy of power and jurisdiction. Peter of Tarantasia had not made a direct connection between God's power and papal power but canonists were beginning to apply the power distinction to matters of the canon. One early example of the spreading of the distinction into the territory of canon law is made by Henry of Segusio, (known as Hostiensis c.1200–1271

²⁹² Leo I, *Sermo* 3.4, col. 147: '*ipsum [i.e. beatum Petrum] vobis, cuius vice fungimur, loqui credite.*' See J. Canning, *Medieval Political Thought* (1996), 29.

²⁹³ J. Canning, *Medieval Political Thought* (1996), 107-8.

²⁹⁴ In Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, 2.22.9 (p. 428), trans in J. Canning, *Medieval Political Thought* (1996), 100, also 2.28.13, 544–5.

²⁹⁵ J. Canning, *Medieval Political Thought* (1996), 107-8.

AD), in his *Lectura in quinque Decretalium* from around the year 1270 AD. Just as Peter Damian had questioned why God could not restore the virgin, Hostiensis questioned a statement of Innocent III on the inability of a pope to release a monk from his vow of poverty. Innocent had observed that not even the pope could do this, since the vow of poverty, like that of chastity, was an essential part of the monastic state.²⁹⁶ Yet, if God could suspend the laws of nature, why could the pope not retract from the decisions that his predecessors had taken, given that the absolute power of the pope is rooted in the absolute power of God? Hostiensis proposed that the pope, out of his *plenitudo potestatis*, could suspend the vow for the greater good, *ratio status ecclesiae*, not as an action *de potestate ordinate* but *de absoluta*. Furthermore, this extraordinary act, permissible because of the situation, could be executed without consultation with the cardinals. By moving from the abstract realm of possibilities to the real power of the *plenitudo potestatis*, the *potentia absoluta* could now be used to explain the nature of a power available for extraordinary human actions and in particular those of the pope. The canonists had hereby devised a way for the pope to change or create laws by acting *absoluta*, even if God never could, because when God acts in an extraordinary way, this is still part of his ordained will.²⁹⁷ This move was not only theologically questionable, but also realistically unstable because whenever the pope and his advisors changed, there were inevitably going to be changes of mind, interest and allegiance. As Courtenay states, ‘the potential arbitrariness in the exercise of any form of human sovereignty, an arbitrariness deplored but widely recognised in mediaeval society, contained serious dangers for the understanding of God and for the distinction of absolute and ordained power if applied to the concept of divine power.’²⁹⁸ It is a dangerous movement that opens the possibility for a human organisation to act in a way comparable with Almighty God.

²⁹⁶ See Hostiensis, *Decretalium Gregorii*. IX, III, tit. 35, c. 6 *Corpus iuris canonici*, (ed.) R. Richter and E. Friedberg I-II [1879], II 600. See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 93; L. Moonan, *Divine Power* (1994), 298-324.

²⁹⁷ See Hostiensis, *Lectura in quinque Decretalium Gregorianarum libros*, ad. 3, 35, 6 (Venice, 1581; repr. 1965), III, fol. 134^r; *Lectura*, ad. 5, 31, 8 (V, fol. 72^v (referring to his discussion of papal dispensation in 3, 10, 4 and 3, 8, 4), *licet secus sit de absoluta*.’ See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 107-8.

²⁹⁸ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 94-5.

Meanwhile, another issue that had been simmering in Paris was about to re-surface. As noted above, the late 12th and early 13th centuries had seen the influx of Graeco-Arabic thought into the theology departments of European universities including Paris. The relationship between the Church and the university in Paris remained generally workable although disquiet on this issue grew as the response from the Church remained mixed. In 1210 AD the Provincial Council of Paris had prohibited both the public and private teaching of Aristotle's 'natural philosophy' and this ban was imposed under pain of excommunication and particularly applied to the growing university of Paris.²⁹⁹ Further warnings followed later when Gregory IX cautioned the masters of Paris not to rely too heavily on philosophy in their teaching. By the middle of the century the warnings continued but it is questionable whether concerns, rather than doctrinal, were now more political, reflecting rivalry between mendicants and seculars. Also inter-mendicant rivalry was stirring because while Franciscan dominance within papal circles had grown, so too had Dominican influence in Paris. By using the ideas of Aristotle, although forming different answers, the cause of Aristotle had been advanced by Dominicans, Albert and Thomas. Meanwhile in the Franciscan camp, there was a mixture of opinion, and in contrast with the extensive use of the distinction by those associated with Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure expressed concerns about Aristotle and 'Arab' philosophers in the Lenten series of 1273 AD.³⁰⁰ The open indifference to continued warnings by some, and yet clear objections by others to this intrusion of philosophy initiated a papal response on January 18, 1277 AD, when John XXI, wrote to Bishop Tempier in Paris and asked him to conduct an inquiry about dangerous doctrines which were reported to be circulating about the University. The letter described the worrisome problem that the clear streams of the Catholic faith was in danger of being polluted.³⁰¹ Tempier was asked to determine by whom and where these errors were being propagated, and to report back to John XXI

²⁹⁹ See F. Copleston, *History of Philosophy* (1950), 209.

³⁰⁰ Bonaventure, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, Conference vi, (ed.) F. Delorme, *S. Bonaventurae Collationes in Hexaëmeron et Bonaventuriana Quaedam Selecta* (1934): 360-1: '... unde illas ideas praecipuus repugnat Aristoteles ... ideo inducunt necessitatem fatalem Arabes ... qui error attribuitur Aristoleli.' See E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy* (1955), 404, 726-7.

³⁰¹ See John XXI, Letter to the Bishop of Paris, (Cad 92, 51), 6, in Denifle, H. and E. Châtelain (eds), *CUP*, 1 (Paris, 1889), 541-58, see appendix ii.

as soon as possible. Instead, he formed a commission of sixteen theologians, including Henry of Ghent (c.1217–1293 AD),³⁰² and had a list of 219 propositions drawn up quickly that the masters at Paris were allegedly teaching on the authority of Aristotle. Without reporting his findings back to the pope, he issued the condemnation of March 7, 1277 AD, on his own authority.³⁰³ The theory that the condemnations were an attempt to reassert divine omnipotence and *potentia absoluta* in opposition to the necessitarianism of radical Aristotelianism may have been overstated. Courtenay explains that, ‘among the proscribed articles were those that maintained that God could not do the impossible,’³⁰⁴ that he acted from necessity³⁰⁵ and that he could not do other than he does.³⁰⁶... None of the condemned propositions had directly challenged the distinction of absolute and ordained power ... No suspect proposition hinged on the difference between capacity and volition.³⁰⁷ It seems the reason for these condemnations may have been theological but the political wranglings and desire to establish power may have been strong motives also. The effects likewise are unclear and more recent research suggests theological scholars were careful, but did not suddenly avoid Aristotle, while non-theological faculties continued to openly embrace Aristotelian logic to the development of their studies. What the condemnations did not solve was the continuing crisis over mendicant privileges, and

³⁰² For background on Henry see G.A. Wilson (ed.), *A companion to Henry of Ghent* (Leiden, 2011).

³⁰³ See J.F. Wippel, *Mediaeval Reactions to the Encounter between Faith and Reason* (Milwaukee, 1995), 19; E. Grant, ‘The Condemnation of 1277, God’s Power and Physical Thought in the Late Middle Ages’, *Viator* 10 (1979), 210-44; L. Bianchi, ‘1277: A Turning Point in Medieval Philosophy’ (1998), 90-110.

³⁰⁴ R. Hissette, *Enquête, sur les 219 Articles condamnés à Paris le 7 Mars 1277* (Louvain and Paris, 1977), 45–9, (17): ‘*Quod impossibile simpliciter non potest fieri a Deo, vel ab agente alio. – Error si de impossibile secundum naturam intelligatur.*’

³⁰⁵ R. Hissette, *Enquête*, (1977), 51 - 53, (20): ‘*Quod Deum necesse est facere quidquid immediate fit ab ipso. – Error, sive intelligatur de necessitate coactionis, quia tollit libertatem, sive de necessitate immutabilitatis, quia ponit impotentiam aliter faciendi.*’

³⁰⁶ R. Hissette, *Enquête*, (1977), 56–7, (23): ‘*Quod Deus non potest irregulariter, id est, alio modo quam movet, movere aliquid, quia in eo non est diversitas voluntatis.*’

³⁰⁷ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 95.

it was this dispute that would lead to significant changes in the definition and use of the distinction.³⁰⁸

Towards the end of the 13th century, the power distinction had become increasingly exposed to philosophical ideas but seemed even more vulnerable to political misuse and the 1277 AD condemnations proved to be nothing more than a temporary side-step. With the prevalent thinking of the day now proposing a contingent rather than necessary world, and God being free to make choices, then so too by analogy were humans, and the requirement of this freedom is a sphere of possibilities from which choices are made. Canonists could now compare human choice with divine will. Bonaventure showed concern that applying a canonist interpretation to the power distinction compromised the divine nature and placed God in a temporal setting. The idea of a deliberating God raises the problem of God taking time to make decisions and divine action is being likened to, and thereby moderated by human frailty. Despite these reservations among some Franciscans, followers of Alexander of Hales, and Dominicans in general embraced the canonist application before it became a tool in the on-going struggle between old rivals. The University of Paris, while growing in prestige, also became a backdrop for the increasing needle between secular clerics and theologians and their scholarly counterparts from the mendicant orders. The increasingly influential Church and expanding mendicant orders meant that, while so strongly entwined, power struggles were inevitable and the canonist modification to the power distinction provided the platform for the dispute between seculars and mendicants to be brought to a head. As noted earlier, during the middle of the century, papal power had begun to favour the mendicants over the seculars who became increasingly perturbed by their lack of privileges in terms of ministry and receiving legacies, and more personally, that they could not even be buried in a mendicant cemetery. The distinction in the power of God became a distinction in papal power as secular theologians adopted canonist proposals claiming there was *extra* or *supra legum* to the law as the ordained will of God. Against the canonist position Petrus de Trabibus said that while God retained the ability to do other things than those pre-ordained, it could never happen that he would act otherwise,³⁰⁹ and the *absoluta* did not refer to any actions.

³⁰⁸ See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 96.

³⁰⁹ Petrus de Trabibus, as cited by Gál, 'Petrus de Trabibus on the Absolute and Ordained power of God' in R.S. Almagno and C.L. Harkins (eds), *Studies honouring Ignatius*

This view follows those proposed by his master, Peter of John Olivi who in turn had been a student of Bonaventure, and so there is a case for the display of inherited loyalty. Alternatively, this was about establishing mendicant power against what was now the rising influence of secular clergy and theologians. Papal power was the issue when Olivi drafted the idea of papal infallibility in 1280 AD to prevent subsequent popes from rescinding a ruling favorable to Franciscans made by the *Exiit*, decree of Pope Nicholas III in 1279 AD. Also Martin IV issued the ‘*Ad fructus uberes*’ bull in 1281 AD, which included for example, the right to hear confessions without the penitent having to repeat the confession to his parish priest. These edicts extended privileges to mendicants that were previously only held by the clergy and so increased the fears of the secular clergy that their authority and position in the parish, and therefore also their stream of income, would diminish.

As popes changed, issues of papal favour moved on without resolution until 1290 AD when Nicholas IV, the first Franciscan pope, sent two cardinals to Paris to settle matters between mendicants and seculars.³¹⁰ This became not just a debate about what mendicants or secular clergy could do, but also about the authority of the pope to act both within canon law and in additional ways, suggesting the parallel with divine action not just out of ordained but also absolute power. Henry of Ghent, taking up the mantle of William of St. Amour for the secular clerics, was looking for change following Martin’s bull, and in a quodlibet from around 1284 AD he considered the distinction between what is possible and what is impossible. In language reminiscent of Aquinas, Henry proposes,

in one sense those things are impossible that are contradictory or repugnant to the common course and order of things. In another sense, however, some things repugnant to nature can be done by a supernatural power.³¹¹

In discussing the nature of things that would be impossible, Henry is suggesting that if something contains a contradiction or repugnancy, then in the present order it is impossible but this should not rule out its possibility through a power that is extra to

Charles Brady, Friar Minor, Franciscan Institute Publications, *Theology Series* 6 (1976), 290.

³¹⁰ See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 99, 110.

³¹¹ Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibeta* VIII, q. 3 (Paris, 1518), fol. 304^v, see appendix ii, summarised in W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 99.

ordinary power. The emphasis is not on God's power or God's will but on the order of things. When speaking about God, Henry's language and thoughts can be seen in Thomas, Bonaventure and Anselm as he emphasises the immutability of God and his ordained will, and absolute power is just hypothetical. Even more significant for this discussion though is how Henry applied the power distinction to consider papal power in an unprinted tract which only survives in one manuscript, dated around 1288-9 AD by Palémon Glorieux and transcribed in a work by John Marrone.³¹² As seen above, the secular masters were concerned that the 'friars' interpretation of "*Ad fructus uberes*" would have meant that most penitents would have never confessed all their sins to their parish priests. The seculars, among them Henry, retorted that the pope must have intended penitents to confess all their sins of the past year to the parish priests, including those previously confessed to the friars. For, they argued, by the mendicant interpretation, Martin IV would have withdrawn parishioners from the jurisdiction of their bishops and curates. Such an act, they contended would have subverted the Church's divine structure since the jurisdiction of prelates came from Christ and not the pope.³¹³ Henry held the delicate position of fronting the cause of the coalition of Parisian secular masters and French bishops in a constitutional dilemma questioning the nature and limits of the powers held by those above him in the Church's hierarchy. He described three decrees that a ruler could make:

1. Those that involve 'an *inconveniens* that stands against natural and divine law, against which (even) the legislator cannot impose or concede (anything) or from which he cannot dispense'. Henry cited the example of a ruler who commanded a sword to be returned to a madman and this would be evil.³¹⁴

³¹² P. Glorieux, *Réertoire des maîtres en théologie de Paris au XIII siècle*, Etudes de philosophie médiévale, 17 (1933), 389, dated this unedited work to the winter of 1288/9 AD because of its close connection to Henry's *Quodlibet* XII, q. 31 of Advent 1288 AD concerning the papal privilege of *Ad fructus uberes*, See J. Marrone, 'The Absolute and the Ordained Powers of the Pope', *Mediaeval Studies* 36 (1974), 12.

³¹³ See J. Marrone, 'The Absolute and the Ordained Powers of the Pope' (1974), 12-3.

³¹⁴ See J. Marrone, 'The Absolute and the Ordained Powers of the Pope' *Mediaeval Studies*, 36 (1974), 15, here and following summarising Henry of Ghent, Bibliothèque Nationale, Manuscript Latin 3120 fol. 139^{rb}, see appendix ii.

2. 'A statute or law that in itself, *in se*, is just and fair, but at certain times may contain an *inconveniens*.' In this case the ruler ordered the madman's sword to be returned to his brother, an act not sinful in itself but resulting in evil when the brother inevitably handed over the sword to the madman.³¹⁵
3. The decrees which did not harm subjects under any circumstances. This class is not not directly referred to but promulgated by the discussion and portrays ordained power.

Henry has used the power distinction by framing the possible actions of a ruler, who legislates for the Church, clearly intended to be the pope, in a way that almost parallels the argument used by Thomas Aquinas,³¹⁶ to consider the actions of God in whether the Father could assume flesh. Rather than a discussion about the absolute power of God, Henry was expanding the secular view on the extent of the *plenitudo potestatis* and so it is case 2 which requires further scrutiny. Henry was careful when referring to case 1, and stated that the papal endorsement of the mendicant view belonged to cases 2 and 3,³¹⁷ and so he avoided the tricky ground of papal actions that could lead to the deposition of a pope. In case 2 he defined absolute power as power used sinfully but validly and so unlike other theologians he refused to credit God with an absolute power by which he could perform acts that could not be done by his ordained power, since this implied God could act unjustly.³¹⁸ In this typically secular view opposing mendicant privileges, Henry distances God from acting out of absolute power but in contrast identifies absolute power with the *plenitudo potestatis* to imply human rulers, such as the pope, could indeed act sinfully, and he cemented his case by citing an earlier text of Bernard of Clairvaux.³¹⁹ As

³¹⁵ See J. Marrone, 'The Absolute and the Ordained Powers of the Pope' (1974), 15, see appendix ii.

³¹⁶ See discussion in Part I on Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, (ed.) Moos (1956), 35-9.

³¹⁷ See J. Marrone, 'The Absolute and the Ordained Powers of the Pope' (1974), 16, see appendix ii.

³¹⁸ See J. Marrone, 'The Absolute and the Ordained Powers of the Pope' (1974), 16-8, see appendix ii.

³¹⁹ See J. Marrone, 'The Absolute and the Ordained Powers of the Pope' (1974), 18, see appendix ii. See Bernard of Clairvaux, *De Consideratione*, in (eds) J. Leclercq, H. M. Rochais, *S. Bernardi Opera Omnia*, 3 (Rome, 1963), 442, 444.

Marrone explains, ‘Henry thus argued that the pope certainly could abolish the need for reiterated confessions by his absolute power. He suggested that although such a measure did not go counter to divine or natural law by its very nature, it could seriously subvert the Church’s divine structure under certain circumstances... His attempt to mark off an area of papal action, that area pertaining to the pope’s absolute power which, although it did not violate divine law was, nevertheless, sinful because it harmed the community’s well-being by violating its fundamental laws, was much more forward-looking and novel than the bishops’ position.’³²⁰ Canonists had considered the idea of the pope acting outside of the law, but never in a sinful way, and the thought that Church rulers could violate divine law suggested that maybe even the pope could sin and be deposed, although Henry did not go that far.³²¹

Undoubtedly his aim was for secular gains after earlier losses to the mendicants but his strong views to the pope’s representatives in 1290 AD, including Benedict Gaetani (Boniface VIII), led to Henry’s suspension from lecturing. For the mendicants, Giles of Rome was keen to keep the *status quo*, and did not equate the *plenitudo potestatis* with *potentia absoluta* for either God or the pope. He pointed out that papal jurisdiction is not a function of absolute ability, but ability in conformity to laws.³²² Giles courted popularity with both Church hierarchy and French royalty, and this muscle was used to remove Henry from office in a victory for the extension of papal power. A more balanced level of power between mendicants and seculars was never attained during Henry’s lifetime but ironically, it was Boniface VIII in *Super Cathedram* of 1300 AD who did subsequently reduce mendicant privileges and allow any man to be buried in a mendicant friary, as long as a quarter of his estate was donated to the Parish.

Even with these rulings determining papal power, mendicant privileges and secular equality, when thinking of the power of God, the *potentia absoluta* had generally remained the sphere of possibility. Secular theologians, in particular Henry of Ghent, had applied canonist thinking and made the analogy between divine *potentia absoluta* and

³²⁰ J. Marrone, ‘The Absolute and the Ordained Powers of the Pope’ (1974), 18.

³²¹ Henry also referred to the absolute and ordained powers of rulers in another work, *Quodlibet* XIV, q. 8. In this discussion, he also equated absolute power with power sinfully and unjustly used, although licit. See J. Marrone, ‘The Absolute and the Ordained Powers of the Pope’ (1974), 17.

³²² See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 100.

papal *plenitudo potestatis* but now, at the turn of the 14th century, radical input to the issue came from a Franciscan. John Duns Scotus (c.1266–1308 AD), was born in Scotland, hence the nickname Scotus, studied at Oxford and lectured on the *Sentences* in Paris where he was appointed Regent Master in 1304 AD before transferring to the Franciscan *Studium* in Cologne in 1307 AD.³²³ Scotus is the most notable theologian of this period for using the power distinction with a tendency towards an operationalisation of the *potentia absoluta* in a manner that can be connected with the regulations and range of papal power. When using the distinction in his discussion on justification and grace, in his treatment on the beatific vision and his work on ethics and moral theory, he is in line with the *Summa Halensis* and Thomas. However, when he applies the distinction in his *Ordinatio* treating Lombard's *distinction* 44, Scotus adopts canonist language to define God's power:

In every agent acting intelligently and voluntarily that can act in conformity with an upright or just law but does not have to do so of necessity, one can distinguish between its ordained power and its absolute power. The reason is that either it can act in conformity with some right and just law, and then it is acting according to its ordained power... or else it can act beyond or against such a law, and in this case its absolute power exceeds its ordained power. And therefore it is not only in God, but in every free agent that can either act in accord with the dictates of a just law or go beyond or against the law, that one distinguishes between absolute and ordained power; therefore, the jurists say that someone can act '*de facto*', that is according to his absolute power, or '*de iure*', that is according to his ordained legal power.³²⁴

A connection is made between law-making at a divine level or at a human one such that whatever it is possible for God to do, could in theory be possible for any free agent. The idea of power is replaced by the law which can be upheld or otherwise by God or indeed

³²³ For background on Scotus see T. Williams, *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (Cambridge, 2003), intro., 1-14.

³²⁴ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un., n. 3, vol. VI, Vatican edition, 363-9, see appendix ii, trans. here and following A.B. Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality* (1997), 191.

any free agent. The distinction is now between the established law as the ordained option, *de iure*, or the potentiality ('can') of going beyond or against the law, *de facto*, as exercising the absolute one. This is not two forms of power but two forms of action that can be chosen, and therefore not necessary. Scotus is defining the *potentia absoluta* as a potential divine action that, 'allows one to act outside and against the legal structure.'³²⁵ This would be a significant step from earlier ideas by applying a canonist interpretation to the theological model and Hester Gelber likewise notes that, whereas William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure and Aquinas consider absolute power as what God could have done otherwise, Scotus, seems to be suggesting, along with the canonists, that God, through his absolute power, can still do otherwise.³²⁶ However Scotus continues by refining his position:

Whenever the law and its rectitude are in the power of the agent, so that the law is right only because it has been established, then the agent can freely order things otherwise than this right law dictates and still act orderly, because he can establish another right or just law according to which he may act orderly. In such a case it is not simply necessary that his absolute power exceed his ordered power, because his action might still be ordered according to another law, just as it had been earlier, but he would still exceed his ordained power according to the prior law, if he acted beyond or against such. This could be illustrated in the case of a ruler and his subjects in regards to a positive law.³²⁷

According to Gelber, Scotus is proposing that, God's absolute power enables him to suspend one ordained order and substitute another ordained order for the first one. God's absolute and ordained powers work in tandem, one enabling suspension of an enacted statute and the other ensuring that God never acts inordinately but only in a way that accords with his legislated will. Because God has the power to endow a created statute with governing power, his absolute power transcends any particular order of created law. He can establish a new legal order if he so desires:

³²⁵ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 102.

³²⁶ See H.G. Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise, Contingency and Necessity in Dominican Theology at Oxford, 1300–1350* (Leiden, Boston, 2004), 313.

³²⁷ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un., in *Opera Omnia*, 6: 364-5, II. 20-8, see appendix ii.

Hence, I say that many other things can be done orderly; and many things that do not include a contradiction other than those that conform to present laws can occur in an ordained way when the rectitude of such law - according to which one acts rightly and orderly – lies in the power of the agent himself. And therefore such an agent can act otherwise, so that he establishes another upright law, which, if it were set up by God, would be right, because no law is right except insofar as the divine will accepts it as established. And in such a case the absolute power of the agent in regard to something would not extend anything other than what might happen ordinately if it occurred, not indeed ordainedly with respect to this present order, but ordinately with reference to some other order that the divine will could set up if it were able to act in such a way.³²⁸

But such a use of his absolute power is not a form of direct action in the world, only a form of action mediated through successive ordained systems.³²⁹

Although Duns Scotus comes close to understanding absolute power as acting power – which would be a serious deviation from all previous positions – for him any action is not completed by absolute power, but has only been made possible by absolute power, acted upon by subsequent ordained power. Everything that happens is part of God’s ordained will and God is able to change or set aside this universal order for a new one.

Scotus also presented how God can act in a particular situation in a manner that would seem contrary to the current universal order:

Keep in mind also that what is ordained and happens regularly can occur in two ways: One way is with reference to a universal order. This would involve common law, like the common law that ordains that “every impenitent sinner must be damned” (as if a king were to establish the law that every murderer is to die). The second way is with reference to a particular order. This involves a particular judgment or decision that does not pertain to a universal law, since a law has to do with cases in general, whereas in a singular case what is involved is not

³²⁸ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un, in *Opera Omnia* 6: 366, II. 8-19, see appendix ii.

³²⁹ See H.G. Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise* (2004), 315.

a general law, but rather a decision according to law about something that is against the law (for instance, a decision that this murderer is to die).

I say, therefore, that God can act otherwise than is prescribed not only by a particular order, but also by a universal order or law of justice, and in doing so he could still act ordainedly, because what God could do by his absolute power that is either beyond or runs counter to the present order, he could do ordainedly.³³⁰

The text distinguishes between the universal prescriptions that, ‘every murderer should die,’ and the particular application of the law, ‘*this* murderer should die.’ Scotus proposed that particular cases that set aside the universal prescriptions of that law do not subvert it, but constitute a particularised application of the universal order.³³¹ Scotus illustrates his point by proposing that God in his mercy could prevent someone from being damned even if they died in a state of sin. The universal rule is that the unrepentant sinner is damned but in a particular case God could supersede justice with mercy and this would be a particular act within God’s order rather than an action of absolute power. Alternatively, Scotus declared that it was not possible, in the specific case, for Judas to be saved within the current dispensation through an ordained judgment, however, because to do so would not include a contradiction, God could substitute the current ordained system for a new one and this would be through absolute power:

But we speak of ordained power in reference only to an order established by a universal law, and not to that which rightly holds by law for a particular case. This is clear from the fact that it is possible for God to save one whom he does not actually save, a living sinner who will die, however, without repenting and will be damned. Admittedly, however, God could not in the same way save Judas, who is already damned. (But for God’s absolute power not even this is impossible, since it does not include a contradiction.) ... God could foresee that Judas could be saved by his ordained power – not what is now his ordained power, for at present Judas could only be saved by God’s absolute power: but Judas’ salvation could have been

³³⁰ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un., see appendix ii.

³³¹ See H.G. Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise* (2004), 315.

accomplished by God's ordained power in another order he might have set up.³³²

Scotus seems to be covering all bases by firstly saying there are particular things that God could do within the current order, even if it is against what is perceived as God's universal law, and then out of absolute power God could hypothetically change things by making a different order. By using legal language, the parallel is being made between human will and divine will. Both God and people have the freedom of will to act, and both act within the ordained system. However, in the way God can act absolutely by making a new order, man can also then act in changing a law or creating a new one.

In a similar manner, in his *Lectura*, Scotus prepares the ground for someone other than God, to act in a way that it was previously thought only God could act, that is, without bounds.³³³ In his *Ordinatio*, Scotus is dealing with Lombard's question of what God could do, but here the power distinction is being applied directly to the law. The parallel is made between God, who acts either within his ordained sphere or beyond, and someone important, such as a king in this text. Scotus is incorporating canonist language though stopping short of a canonist position with absolute power only possible within the divine will. As Courtenay observes, 'the emphasis Scotus placed on law-changing and on God's unhindered ability to act outside and against his established laws allowed *potentia absoluta* to appear as a form of extraordinary divine action, *supra legem*.'³³⁴ Gelber points out that Courtenay would be wrong to suggest that Scotus is proposing that God acts directly in the world out of absolute power and that God is not able to start acting absolutely in the current order but he is able to set aside the current one in favour of another. Scotus hereby maintains both divine free will and the contingency of created reality³³⁵ in a view proposing that God is capable of 'doing something new' without 'changing his mind' based on considering how God acts everything in a single instance

³³² John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un., in *Opera Omnia* 6: 366, I. 20-368, I. 14, see appendix ii.

³³³ See John Duns Scotus, *Lectura* I, d. 44, q. un., n.3, 5 (*Opera Omnia* XVII, ed. Vaticana, 533f.), see W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 101, H.G. Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise* (2004), 312-3.

³³⁴ See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 102.

³³⁵ See H. Veldhaus, 'Ordained and Absolute Power in Scotus' *Ordinatio* I, 44, *Vivarium* 38, 2 (2000), 223.

of eternity. It is not that he could deviate from his own plan, but God, because he actualises creation simultaneously with all possibilities, can in the present tense, do otherwise than he does. Gelber states, 'From God's perspective, no extension of time exists in which his creation, taken as a whole, could become other than it is. It can (present tense) be other than it is because possibility and actuality are indexed to the same moment of divine present time, but creation does not become other than it is.'³³⁶

In more concrete terms, Scotus was using a theological distinction to permit a change of law that could be justified as being within the divine order. There is no possibility of God changing his mind and yet Scotus was looking to justify the pope being able to change the law as it stood. This may have been a response to the reduction of mendicant privileges by *Super Cathedram* as well as his own personal situation. Despite being presented to the Bishop of Lincoln in 1300 AD, Scotus was denied the license to hear confession and so he would certainly be keen for the possibility of enabling a pope to change rules set down by previous ones.

The power distinction could well have been adopted here to provide theological justification to the suggestion that the pope could act beyond any jurisdiction as long as it could be claimed to be for the good of the Church. It seems possible that, rather than a secular interpretation of the distinction being used to allow change in order to benefit the secular cause, a mendicant, following a papal swing from mendicant to secular, was now able to apply the distinction to press for change on behalf of the mendicant camp. Either way, it is clear that the power distinction was now a tool that was being utilised in the attempt to justify legal change theologically.

Franciscan followers of Scotus such as John of Bassolis and Antonius Andreas continued this emphasis on the power to act being dependent on the one acting. Bassolis, also commenting on Lombard's *Sentences*, *Book I distinction 44*, in 1313 AD and so slightly later than Eckhart's *Question six* presented the power distinction clearly in terms of judicial action:

When one acts or judges according to legislated rules, one acts *de potentia ordinata*. When one acts outside, or against the law, then one acts *de potentia absoluta*. The latter is a means of action open only to the law giver, who, in acting 'absolutely', can never act 'inordinately'. Those who are subject to the law and act outside or against it, however,

³³⁶ H.G. Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise* (2004), 318.

do act ‘inordinately’, although not *de potentia absoluta*. They cannot change or override the laws that govern their actions and behaviour, and any violations are culpable. The prince or lawgiver, on the other hand, has both the power to obey and apply the laws he has made or to suspend or modify those laws.³³⁷

The focus is on the prince or anyone who makes the law and those who are just subject to the law in this pattern for judging within the legal system that is applying a theological tool. The *potentia absoluta* is a means of action open only to the law giver who, because he is the law giver only acts according to the law and never inordinately. This one then, who makes the laws, is able to suspend or modify a law, but those who are subject to the law are powerless to change things. Those who are subject to the law cannot act *de potentia absoluta* and so when they act outside or against the law they do so inordinately. Bassolis did not specifically deal with the case of a judge but Antonius differentiated between the prince as law-maker and a judge as law-executor stating that,

³³⁷ Johannes Bassolis, *Super I Sent.*, d. 44, q. un. (Paris, 1517) fol. 213^{vb}: ‘*Nam potentia ordinata est in agente tali quando agit secundum regulam rectam institutam, sed quando agit contra illam vel praeter legem tunc dicitur potentia absoluta, eo modo quod iuristae distinguunt posse de facto et de iure. Quando autem illa lex non est in potestate agentis sed est instituta ab alio cui subiectum est tale agens, tunc potentia eius absoluta non potest excedere potentiam eius ordinatam circa aliqua obiecta in agendo inordinate. Quicquid enim potest et agit circa materiam legis praeter legem vel contra legem potius inordinate potest et agit. Si autem agens non sit subditum legi sed lex sit in potestate agentis, et cum hoc etiam rectitudo legis, ita quod lex non est sibi lex nec est recta nisi quia instituta a tali agente, tunc potest agens aliter ordinare ex libertate... et tunc planum est quod in tali agente potentia absoluta excedit ordinatam secundum unam legem sine omni deordinatione vel inordinatione, sed cum alia ordinatione vel lege. Et possent poni exempla de lege mere positiva et principe potestatem ipsam cum subditis suis, sed non curo.*’ Cited from E. Randi, *Lex est in potestate agentis*. Per una storia della Sheet idea scotista di Potentia Absoluta, in *Sopra la volta del mondo. Omnipotenza e potenza assoluta di Dio tra Medioevo e Età Moderna*, (ed.) M. Beonio-Brocchieri Fumagalli (Bergamo, 1986), 136, trans. W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 115-6.

a judge who does not apply the law as established by the prince acts improperly (*non recta*), while the prince himself, acting in the same way, would act properly.³³⁸

Like Bassolis above, only the one who makes the law is effectively outside of the law. As well as certain seculars and Franciscans the juridical interpretation of the distinction was also applied by some Dominicans such as Pierre de Palude, a fellow Dominican and contemporary of Eckhart in Paris. Pierre lectured on the *Sentences* in Paris in 1310 – 11 AD, was involved in the internal commission appointed in 1313 AD that led to the censure of fellow Dominican, Durandus of St. Pourçain and became a master in 1314 AD. Palude proposed that God, as the source of the law, is able to change the law and made the connection between divine power and human sovereignty meaning the pope, as the one with the power within canon law, paralleled the emperor who had executive power within Roman law. Courtenay notes that Pierre argued in the manner of Hostiensis such that, ‘the pope has the power to dispense a monk from his religious vow.’³³⁹ Yet the papal *potentia absoluta* did not extend to laws that were not created by the Church or that belonged to the *status ecclesiae*,³⁴⁰ and so the pope could not make a dispensation allowing a divorced person to remarry,³⁴¹ but could *de potentia absoluta* reverse the trend

³³⁸ Antonius Andreas, IV *Sent. opus* I, d. 44, q. un. (Venice, 1578), fol. 46^{va}: ‘*Iudex si non agit secundum legem sibi praefixam a principe agit non recte; sed princeps potest sibi aliam legem praefigere, secundum quam aget recte.*’ Trans. W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 116. Cited from E. Randi, *Lex est potestate agentis* (1986), 131; see also, ‘A Scotist way of distinguishing between God’s Absolute and Ordained Powers’, in A. Hudson and M. Wilks (eds), *From Ockham to Wyclif* (Oxford, 1987), 136.

³³⁹ Pierre de Palude, *Sent.* IV, d. 33, q. 1, a. 1 (Venice, 1493), fol. 165^{vb} and 166^{ra}. Pierre had in mind the case of Ramiro II of Aragon, 1134 - 8 AD. See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 135, note 15; Jean Dunbabin, *A Hound of God* (1991), 21, 45, 67.

³⁴⁰ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 117, J. Dunbabin, *A Hound of God* (1991), 67.

³⁴¹ Pierre de Palude, *Sent.* IV, d. 33, q. 1, a. 1 (fol. 166^{ra}), see W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 117.

of mendicant privileges and re-introduce double confession.³⁴² In these texts papal power is given both its scope and limitations.

Although it was naturally among Scotus' Franciscan followers that this juridical interpretation received the most attention, it should also be noted from the Dominican angle, even in his work highlighting the problems with Scotus' *Sentence Commentary*, Thomas Sutton, despite writing mostly against Scotus, accepted Scotus' definition of the power distinction.³⁴³

Alongside Scotus as a key figure of the early 14th century is fellow Franciscan, William of Ockham (1288–1347 AD),³⁴⁴ and although consideration of Ockham should be acknowledged as post – Eckhart, his views do bear relation to the context of Eckhart's second magisterium in Paris.³⁴⁵ Ockham used the distinction, like Scotus, throughout his writings, but while he borrowed the language of the Scot, he used it to provide a contrasting interpretation of the distinction. Ockham emphasised, as with Aquinas, the

³⁴² See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 117, J. Dunbabin, *A Hound of God* (1991), 117.

³⁴³ See Thomas Sutton, *Liber Propugnatorius super I Sententiarum contra Iohannem Scotum* (Venice, 1523), fol. 124^{vb} in E. Randi, *Lex est in potestate agentis* (1986), 135. Schmaus' major work on Sutton and later investigation seem to suggest the author of this may well be Thomas of Wylton, who like Sutton was also known as Thomas Anglicus. See M. Schmaus and M. González-Haba (eds), *Thomas von Sutton Quodlibeta* BAW, 2 (Munich, 1969); C. Schabel, *Theology at Paris 1316–1345*. (Aldershot 2000), 52–63, esp. 52–4; R.L. Friedman, Dominican Quodlibetal Literature in C. Schabel (ed.), *Theological Quodlibeta in the Middle Ages, the Fourteenth Century* (Leiden, 2007), 423–6; W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 116, 133.

³⁴⁴ For background on Ockham see W.J. Courtenay, 'The Academic and Intellectual Worlds of Ockham' in P.V. Spade (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (Cambridge, 1999), 17–30; *Ibid.*, intro, 1–16.

³⁴⁵ Van den Brink notes that R.P. Desharnais emphasises the continuity between Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham and likewise Mary Pernoud compares the thoughts of these three on divine power, see G. van den Brink, *Almighty God* (1993), 79; R.P. Desharnais, The History of the Distinction between God's Absolute Power, 73–167, M.A. Pernoud, 'The Theory of the *Potentia Dei* according to Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham', *Antonianum* 47 (1972), 69–95.

absoluta was a way to hypothesise about the things God was able to do but does not wish to do. For Scotus, when God changes the law he does so extraordinarily but this remains *ordinata* and never *inordinata*. It is within God's power to decree another law so that his *de facto* becomes in effect *de iure*. Alternatively Ockham saw this as *inordinata* and so actioned out of *absoluta*, asserting that God could never act in this way that represents possibility, not a sphere of action. Likewise, as shown by Eugenio Randi, in order to keep *absoluta* merely as possibility, whereas Scotus said God can do things *de facto* that he cannot do *de iure*,³⁴⁶ Ockham considered them as effectively the same with *de facto* not pointing to anything actually possible, because whatever God could do, *de potentia absoluta*, that he will never do, *de potentia ordinata*, then *de facto* he will never do them.³⁴⁷ Ockham did use the idea of *potentia absoluta* in connection with papal power but unlike Scotus, and more like Olivi and Trabibus, to show that the pope is bound to uphold his laws once instituted. As Courtenay writes, 'While the canonists used the distinction to underscore the present ability of the pope to act outside his laws, Ockham used the distinction to underscore the present inability of the pope to act outside ecclesiastical law once instituted. Ockham did not intend to identify *potentia absoluta* with extraordinary action on the part of the pope, but simply to apply to the concept of papal power, the self-binding notion of the distinction and the pact or covenant it implied.'³⁴⁸ The various uses of the distinction by Ockham have led to extensive research but his differing proposals as well as personal interest in dealing with John XXII have caused diverse conclusions. The consensus seems to be that he erred more towards Aquinas rather than Scotus and generally regarded the distinction as, 'an heuristic instrument for detecting and articulating the radical contingency of created reality', while rebutting 'the threat of the still pervasive Graeco-Arabic necessitarianism.'³⁴⁹ His contribution to the debate falls after Eckhart but it is worth noting that Ockham regarded this,

³⁴⁶ See John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un., n. 3, vol. VI, Vatican edition, 363-9, trans. A.B. Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality* (1997), 191, (above).

³⁴⁷ See William of Ockham, *Tractatus contra Benedictum* III 3, in H.S. Offler (ed.), *Opera Politica* III (Manchester, 1956), 233.

³⁴⁸ W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 122. See also Ockham's treatment of the distinction in, *Quodlibeta septem* VI, q. 1 (*Opera Theologica* vol. IX [St. Bonaventure, 1980], 585-6).

³⁴⁹ G. van den Brink, *Almighty God* (1993), 83.

common distinction of the theologians... when... sensibly understood,
is in harmony with the orthodox faith.³⁵⁰

And he accused Pope John XXII of heresy by not accepting the distinction and ‘having allegedly implied in one of his sermons that everything comes about by necessity and nothing in a manner completely contingent.’³⁵¹

The early years of the 14th century were turbulent as Church and state issues led to difficult times for the papacy. The dispute for supremacy between Philip of France and the Church led to the papal bull, *Unam Sanctum* of 1302 AD, in which there are many mentions of power but these are about establishing the extent of the power of the Church over its members, and the pope over his subjects, rather than the power distinction.

This background has noted how the power distinction was used as a tool in the disputes between mendicants and seculars, theologians and philosophers, and also inter mendicant rivalries yet there was even inter-Dominican disputes simmering around the time of Eckhart. The conflict between Durandus of Pourçain and Hervaeus Natalis seemed to cover different issues from 1307 AD although, as previously thought, Lowe points out, Durandus’ first commentary on the *Sentences* that year was coincidental,³⁵² and Durandus had attacked the Thomism of Natalis, his master in Paris earlier in 1302-3 AD. This was both a doctrinal and personality clash with the loyal Dominicanism and proponent of Thomism, Natalis at friction with the radical and sharper Durandus. Pierre de Palude and John of Naples also joined in the fray using their own works to question the orthodoxy of Durandus around 1310 AD. Natalis became a key figure in structuring the Dominican order by promoting equality and giving priority to the teaching of Aquinas. There is no evidence to suggest the power distinction was used to strengthen either case in this dispute within the order, and while the tension within the order would have been known to the Meister, it does not appear to have affected his teaching.

³⁵⁰ William of Ockham, *Tractatus contra Benedictum III* 3, in H.S. Offler (ed.), *Opera Politica* III (Manchester, 1956), 3:230, trans. F. Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order* (1984), 61.

³⁵¹ F. Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order* (1984), 61.

³⁵² See Elizabeth Lowe, ‘*The Contested Theological Authority of Thomas Aquinas. The Controversies between Hervaeus Natalis and Durandus of St. Pourçain*’ (Abingdon, 2003), 64–83.

Clearly at the time of Eckhart the connection between papal and divine power was blurred as demonstrated by a question of Gerard of Saint Victor. Glorieux dates this particular question to a quodlibet from around 1312-13 AD but Courtenay suggests that, because Gerard was still regent master in 1317, this is too precise and it is only possible to date it as sometime between 1310 and 1317 AD. The question is recorded with others of Gerard in the Vat. Lat. 1086 manuscript on the folios following Eckhart's questions, and without referring specifically to the power distinction, power is presented as twofold although without using notions of being absolute or directed. This question of power confirms that the issue of questioning papal power in the light of divine power was still an evocative issue in Paris at this time.³⁵³ Gerard considers whether the power bestowed by ordination should be considered as being from Christ or from the pope. This is a comment again on how, and by whom, political power within the church should be exercised. He proposes that power is from Christ but this has been given to the pope to exercise for the common good. Also slightly later than Eckhart's magisterium, another Dominican master, John of Naples presented several questions concerning the omnipotence of God using the power distinction to present his views.³⁵⁴ Courtenay shows that John follows Thomas with the view that God could assume an irrational nature, *de potentia absoluta*, but such was inappropriate, *de potentia ordinata*.

The theme of omnipotence was evidently common in *quodlibeta* in these early decades of the 14th century and the questioning of ideas was a key part of a student's learning and testing the sharpness of a master's mind. From the late 13th century, the *potentia ordinata* had become more than the willed actions of God as there was now the possibility of exceptions and God, doesn't just possess the capacity to do other than he does, he could change situations by acting in an extraordinary way. *Potentia absoluta* meant that God is

³⁵³ Gerard of Saint Victor, Vat. Lat. 1086 fol. 224^v. Transcription by A. Quero-Sánchez and I.R. Richardson, see appendix ii. See W.J. Courtenay, 'Reflections on Vat. Lat. 1086 and Prosper of Reggio Emilia', O.E.S.A. in Christopher Schabel (ed.), *Theological Quodlibeta in the Middle Ages, the Fourteenth Century* (Leiden: 2007), 352-3; P. Glorieux, *La Littérature Quodlibétique* vol. II (Paris, 1935), 96.

³⁵⁴ See W.J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 118-9, summarising John of Naples, *Quaestiones variae disputatae*, q. 3, punctum 3, ad. 3, q. 36, punctum 2 (Naples, 1618).

not bound by necessarily actualising all possibilities and as well as being sovereign and sustaining power, he could also act in alternative ways in a given situation.

By making the distinction an issue of human freedom and sovereignty the idea of *de potentia absoluta* could now be seen as the goal itself, the actual power not just to suspend any law of nature or ordained happening but the license to act beyond existing parameters. As van den Brink confirms, ‘The critical, transcendental concept of *potentia absoluta* is misunderstood as referring to a resource which is actualised from time to time in the real world.’³⁵⁵ This misuse in particular could be utilised by the pope, who as God’s representative, could act in a way never previously thought, as long as it could be justified under the category of being for the general good of the Church. It was as if absolute power was now a means for papal activity, claiming the authority of God, but in practice simply of human will.

The early 14th century saw this increasing emphasis on how absolute power could be actualised and Oakley suggests the degree to which the invocation of the absolute power had consistently been motivated by the wish to vindicate the Old Testament vision of Yahweh as a personal God of power and might against the threat of philosophic determinism,’... matches, ‘the affiliated discrimination of a divine ordained power,’... that, ‘is likewise a response to another fundamental biblical theme – that of God’s promise and covenant.’³⁵⁶ The terms and nuances used to describe how God’s omnipotence should be understood according to their development within context, but the fundamental notion of omnipotence is traceable throughout. Changes in theological, philosophical thinking, and to some extent, ecclesiastical power, oversaw the framing of a power distinction and yet both notions of the *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* are rooted in the Jewish scriptures.

From this Hebrew foundation to the 14th century need to express the absolute omnipotence of God in contemporary terms, we find the unique place of Meister Eckhart, and it seems the re-appointing of Eckhart to Paris was strategic so that the Dominicans would have his innovative and provocative theology as a champion of their intellectual thrust in Paris.³⁵⁷ As a Dominican Magister teaching in Paris, there can be no doubt that

³⁵⁵ G. van den Brink, *Almighty God* (1993), 83-84.

³⁵⁶ F. Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order* (1984), 61.

³⁵⁷ Pater Walter Senner OP explains the complex reasons for Eckhart’s 2nd Paris *magisterium* in W. Senner, ‘Meister Eckhart’s life, Training, Career and Trial’ (2013),

he would have been well aware of the implications when opening up this question of the power distinction. Likewise there should be no doubting the Meister's awareness and desire to speak into the political as well as theological issues presented by this question. Was this the moment to engage with inter-mendicant, or inter-Dominican rivalries, or with the issue of papal or secular power or even that of the regency over the Church? Whether or not the context was the prime reason for presenting his thoughts is difficult to ascertain because in this transcript alone, there are no definite pointers to anything other than the theology and philosophy of the question. Certainly some of his predecessor's treatments of the omnipotence of God, and the distinction, are considered in such a way that frailties in the arguments of even the revered Augustine and Thomas are exposed. The incisive manner of the Meister develops a line of thought that is typically radical, and therefore typically Eckhartian, and in some respects controversial, and yet on inspection, there does not seem to be an overtly political thrust. Having said this, if so desired, the implications of Eckhart's notion of absolute power would have strengthened the hand of anyone seeking to justify the possession of an excessive amount of power and control.

26-8. See also Christopher M. Wojtulewicz, 'Theology and Speculation at the University of Paris in the Early Fourteenth Century' in P. Gemeinhardt and T. Georges (eds), *Theologie und Bildung im Mittelalter*, Archa Verbi Subsidia 13 (Münster, 2015), 261-274.

Part II. *Parisian Question six*

Introduction

The focus for this part of the thesis is the actual text of the question under investigation. The following codex and earlier transcriptions have been used to produce a new transcription and English translation.

V = Codex Vaticanus Latinus 1086, *olim* Prosper de Reggio, 1312-23 AD.

gr = Martin Grabmann, *Neuaufgefundene Pariser Quaestiones Meister Eckharts und ihre Stellung in seinem geistigen Entwicklungsgange* (Munich: 1927), 115.

d = *Magistri Eckardi Quaestiones Parisienses*, (ed.) Antoine Dondaine, *commentariolum de Eckardi Magisterio adiunxit Raymundus Klibansky, Magistri Eckardi Opera Latina*, XIII (Leipzig, 1936), 32-4.

st = Loris Sturlese, *Magistri Echardi, Quaestiones Parisienses*, LW V Supplementum, (ed.) and (German) trans. Josef Koch, Bernhard Geyer, Eric Seeberg, Loris Sturlese (2006), 461-2.

se = Pater Walter Senner O.P., forthcoming, to be published by Reclam.

Citation of the Latin Works (LW) and German Works (DW):

[*Abbreviated title of the text*] n. [paragraph number], (L(D)W [volume], [page number(s)], [line number(s)]). For example: *In Ex.* n. 30 (LW II 36,7).

DW and LW = *Meister Eckhart. Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke, Hrsg. im Auftrag der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft* (Stuttgart, 1956-2015).

Question Six

Meister Eckhart, *Quaest. Par.* VI, (LW I/2) 461-2, (ed.) L. Sturlese (Stuttgart, 2015).

The Bible version used for the parallels in the critical apparatus is *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem, ... recensuit et brevi apparatu critico instruxit Robertus Weber ... editionem quartam emendatam ... praeparavit Roger Gryson* (Stuttgart, 1994) (Sigle: v).

The codex contains many words that are abbreviated and so it has been important to

consider as clearly as possible what the intended word actually is or could be. Also the nature of the notes recorded is such that words are omitted that today are necessary in order to make the text flow with understanding.

[...] = Words enclosed by square brackets are not in the text but are implied by the text.

< ... > = Words in delta brackets have been added to the translation of the transcription to help the flow or understanding of the translation.

Critical text and translation

The text, critical apparatus and English translation have the following structure:

1	Latin text
2	Codex and Editions
3	OT and NT Parallels
4	Critical Apparatus
5	Eckhart parallels
6	Earlier or contemporary parallels
7	Reception text parallels
8	Translation

1	Utrum omnipotentia, que est in Deo, debeat attendi secundum potentiam absolutam vel secundum potentiam ordinatam?	q6
V fol. 222 ^{va} ; 1 Utrum] gr 115; d 32,13; st 461,1; se 32,1.		
<i>Gen.</i> 17:1, 35:11; <i>Exod.</i> 6:3, 15:3; <i>Job</i> 11:7; <i>Ps.</i> 24:10; <i>Ezek.</i> 10:5; <i>Amos</i> 4:13; <i>Rev.</i> 1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 15:3, 19:6.		
1 <i>In Ex.</i> n. 27 (LW II 32,6-8): ‘et secundo quomodo in scriptura et a doctoribus et sanctis dicatur deus quaedam non posse’.		
1-2 John Duns Scotus, <i>Lectura</i> I, d. 44, q. un., n.3, 5, (1966), 533-4: ‘Dicendum quod quando est agens quod conformiter agit legi et rationi rectae, – si non limitetur et alligetur illi legi, sed illa lex subest voluntati suae, potest ex potentia absoluta aliter agere; ... sicut, ponatur quod aliquis esset ita liber (sicut rex) quod possit facere legem et eam mutare, tunc praeter illam legem de potentia sua absoluta aliter potest agere, quia potest legem mutare et aliam statuere ... Et sic patet quomodo debet intelligi quod Deus potest facere de potentia absoluta quod non potest de potentia ordinata’; <i>Ordinatio</i> I, d. 44, q. un., n. 3 (1963), 364: ‘Et ideo non tantum in Deo, sed in omni agente libere – qui potest agere secundum dictamen legis rectae et praeter talem legem vel contra eam – est distinguere inter potentiam ordinatam et absolutam; ideo dicunt iuristae quod aliquis hoc potest facere de facto, hoc est de potentia sua absoluta, – vel de iure, hoc est de potentia ordinata secundum iura.’		
1-2 Johannes Bassolis, <i>Super I Sent.</i> , d. 44, q. un. (1517), fol. 213 ^{vb} : ‘Nam potentia ordinata est in agente tali quando agit secundum regulam rectam institutam, sed quando agit contra illam vel praeter legem tunc dicitur potentia absoluta, eo modo quod iuristae distinguunt posse de facto et de iure. Quando autem illa lex non est in potestate agentis sed est instituta ab alio cui subiectum est tale agens, tunc potentia eius absoluta non potest excedere potentiam eius ordinatam circa aliqua obiecta in agendo inordinate. Quicquid enim potest et agit circa materiam legis praeter legem vel contra legem potius inordinate potest et agit. Si autem agens non sit subditum legi sed lex sit in potestate agentis, et cum hoc etiam rectitudo legis, ita quod lex non est sibi lex nec est recta nisi quia instituta a tali agente, tunc potest agens aliter ordinare ex libertate..., et tunc planum est quod in tali agente potentia absoluta excedit ordinatam secundum unam legem sine omni deordinatione vel inordinatione, sed cum alia ordinatione vel lege. Et possent poni exempla de lege mere positiva et principe potestatem ipsam cum subditis suis, sed non curo’; Joannes de Napoli, <i>Quaestiones variae disputatae</i> , q. 3, punctum 3, ad 3 (1618), 25-6: ‘Non enim omne prius potest virtute divina absolvi a posteriori, quantitas enim non potest fieri sine figura etiam de potentia Dei absoluta, supposito secundum communem doctrinam quod Deus non possit facere quantum infinitum ... Vel dicendum quod si Deus de potentia absoluta conferret alicui gratiam sine charitate, talis esset dignus vita aeterna non simpliciter, cum supponatur carere charitate, sed secundum quid, idest ratione gratiae; sicut si Deus alicui de potentia absoluta conferret visionem beatam sine dilectione et fruitione, talis esset beatus non simpliciter, sed secundum quid, utpote cui conferretur lumen gloriae secundum visionem tantum’; <i>Quaestiones variae disputatae</i> , q. 36, punctum 2, p.313, ‘Quamvis autem de potentia absoluta Deus potuerit naturam irrationalem assumere, ut supra probatum est, tamen de potentia ordinata non decuit quod assumeretur’; William of Ockham, <i>Quodlibeta septem</i> VI, q. 1, <i>Opera Theologica</i> (1980), 585-6: ‘Quaedam potest Deus facere de potentia ordinata et aliqua de potentia absoluta. Haec distinctio non est sic intelligenda quod in Deo sint realiter duae potentiae quarum una sit ordinata et alia absoluta, quia unica potentia est in Deo ad extra, quae omni modo est ipse Deus. Nec sic est intelligenda quod aliqua potest Deus ordinate facere, et aliqua potest absolute et non ordinate, quia Deus nihil potest facere inordinate. Sed est sic intelligenda quod “posse [facere] aliquid” quandoque accipitur secundum leges ordinatas et institutas a Deo, et illa dicitur Deus posse facere de potentia ordinata. Aliter accipitur “posse” pro posse facere omne illud quod non includit contradictionem fieri, sive Deus ordinavit se hoc facturum sive non, quia multa potest Deus facere quae non vult facere, secundum Magistrum Sententiarum, lib. I, d. 43’; <i>Summa logicae</i> III, 4, c. 6 (OP I, 779-80): ‘Item, talis propositio “Deus per suam potentiam absolutam potest aliquem acceptare sine gratia sed non per suam potentiam ordinatam” multiplex est. Unus sensus est quod Deus per unam potentiam, quae est absoluta et non ordinata, potest acceptare aliquem sine gratia, et per unam aliam potentiam, quae est ordinata et		

non absoluta, non potest acceptare eum, quasi essent duae potentiae in Deo per quarum unam posset hoc et non per aliam. Et iste sensus falsus. Aliter accipitur improprie, ut ponatur ista propositio pro ista oratione: Deus potest acceptare aliquem sine gratia informante, quia hoc non includit contradictionem, et tamen ordinavit quod hoc numquam est factururus. Et iste sensus verus est'; *Tractatus contra Benedictum III* 3, *Opera Politica III*, (ed.) H.S. Offler (1956), 233, 'Deus aliqua potest de potentia absoluta, quae tamen nunquam faciet de potentia ordinata, hoc est de facto numquam faciet.'

1	Whether omnipotence which is in God should be considered as absolute power or as directed power?	q6
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1	Et videtur, quod secundum ordinatam, quia debet attendi secundum quod decet Deum facere, et secundum ea, que potest facere. Contra: Omnipotentia respicit omnia que non implicant contradictionem, et hec sunt plura quam ordinata.	<1> <2>
V fol. 222 ^{va} ; 1 Et] gr 115; d 32,15; st 461,6; se 32,3.		
<i>Gen.</i> 18:14; <i>Exod.</i> 15:6; <i>1Chr.</i> 29:11; <i>Ps.</i> 115:3, 135:6; <i>Jer.</i> 32:17; <i>Amos</i> 4:13; <i>Matt.</i> 9:6; <i>John</i> 3:8; <i>Rev.</i> 11:17, 15:3, 19:6.		
1 quod] <i>om.</i> gr; 2 que] quae d, st. 3 que] quae d, st; 4 hec] haec d, st.		
<p>1 <i>In Ex.</i> n. 27 (LW II 32,4-6): ‘primo quod omnipotentia proprie deo convenit et ipse solus potest omnia: “omnipotens”, ait, “nomen eius” - circa primum videndum quomodo deus possit omnia’; 3-4 <i>In Ex.</i> n. 30 (LW II 36,11-4): ““Omnipotens” duo dicit: omnia et potentia, potens omnia, potens omnium. Quae ergo sunt de numero omnium, illa potest. Iterum quae posse est potentiae, illa potest. Quae vero nec sunt in numero omnium et quae posse non est posse sed potius non posse, illa non potest’; <i>In Ex.</i> n. 32-3 (LW II 38,8-39,2): ‘Quantum ad primum dicimus deum non posse omnia, quae implicant contradictionem. Si enim contradictoria ponantur simul esse, sequitur neutrum eorum esse. Si enim unum est, non est alterum, et e converso. Igitur si utrumque est, neutrum est. Rursus etiam universaliter dicimus deum non posse malum, quia malum ut sic non est nec ens est nec cadit in numero omnium. Adhuc deus dicitur non posse ea quae contradictionem implicant et mala, in quantum mala, quia huiusmodi posse non est posse sive nihil posse, eo quod talia sint nihil et non entia, sed sint privatio omnis entis nec habent causam efficientem, cum non sint effectus, sed habent causam deficientem, cum sint defectus. Deus autem, utpote esse, non potest deficere in esse, se ipsum amittere non potest, “se ipsum negare non potest”, 2<i>Tim.</i> 2 [vs. 13]’; <i>Quaest. Par.</i> IV, n. 3 (LW V 72, 1-2, 7-8): ‘Utrum aliquem motum esse sine termino implicet contradictionem ... Dicendum quod implicat contradictionem, quia non contingit moveri, nisi contingat motum esse. Item esset potentia sine actu.’</p>		
<p>1 Thom. Aqu., <i>Q.d. De potentia</i>, q. 1, a. 1, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 9: ‘Deo autem convenit esse actum purum et primum; unde ipsi convenit maxime agere, et suam similitudinem in alias diffundere, et ideo ei maxime convenit potentia activa’; Alexander of Hales, <i>Glossa</i>, I, d. 44 (Quaracchi, 1951), I, 448: ‘Ad notitiam eorum quae hic dicuntur, notandum quod omnia potest Deus quae posse non est “non posse” vel “non decere”. Licet ergo posset incarnari quoad potentiam absolutam, non tamen quoad potentiam decentem’; 3-4 Thom. Aqu., <i>Scriptum Sent.</i> I, d. 42, q. 2, a. 2, sol., (ed.) Mandonnet (Paris, 1929), 991: ‘per consequens dicitur non posse facere omne illud in quo contradictio implicatur, et propter hoc non potest facere quod illud quod praeteritum est non fuerit ... et ex hoc sequitur ulterius quod nullum eorum possit in quibus contrarium praedicati est in definitione subiecti, ut quod faciat hoc, scilicet hominem non esse rationalem, vel triangulum non habere tres lineas. In hoc ipso enim quod ponitur triangulus, ponitur tres lineas habere; unde hoc est simul habere tres est non habere’; <i>Scriptum Sent.</i> III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, (ed.) Moos (Paris, 1956), 38: ‘Dicendum est ergo, quod patrem incarnari, non est de illis quae potentiae Dei absolutae non subduntur; cum neque contradictionem implicet, neque defectum aliquem incarnatio in persona incarnata ponat: est enim eadem dignitas patris et filii, et ratio eadem personalitatis in utroque: nec est etiam de illis quae ex se inconvenientiam habent’; <i>Scriptum Sent.</i> III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 4, resp., (ed.) Moos (Paris, 1956), 41: ‘Dicendum quod tres personas divinas assumere unam humanam naturam in unitate unius personae, est impossibile, quia contradictionem implicat’; <i>Q.d. De potentia</i>, q. 1, a. 7, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 23 a-b: ‘Potentia Dei, quantum est de se, ad omnia illa obiecta se extendit quae contradictionem non implicant ... Relinquitur ergo quod Dei potentia ad ea se extendat quae sunt possibilia secundum se. Haec autem sunt quae contradictionem non implicant’; Henry of Ghent, <i>Quodlibeta</i> VIII, q. 3 (Paris, 1518), fol. 304^v: ‘Ponere impossibile primo modo simpliciter implicat contradictionem et repugnat factioni secundum omnem cursum et ordinem rerum’; John Duns Scotus, <i>Reportatio Parisiensis</i> iv, d. 1, q. 5: ‘aliquid autem est possibile deo dupliciter: vel secundum potentiam absolutam, qua potest omne id quod non includit contradictionem, aut secundum potentiam eius ordinatam secundum quam fit omne illud quod consonat legibus divinae iustitiae et regulis sapientiae eius; quos si fieret aliter, et secundum alias leges statutas et ordinatas a divina voluntate, non inordinate fieret, sed ita ordinate sicut modo secundum ista.’</p>		

3-4 Hugh de Novocastro, *Sent.* I, d. 42, q. 2, (ed.) E. Randi, *Il sovrano* (1987), 135-6: ‘De primo sciendum quod licet potentia divina sit una secundum rem, potest tamen distingui tripliciter secundum rationem in potentiam absolutam, ordinabilem et ordinatam. Potentia absoluta Dei dicitur quae respicit omne possibile quod contradictionem non includit. Eadem secundum rem dicitur ordinabilis secundum illud quod contradictionem non includit habet rationem sapientialem in Deo secundum quam si fieret bene fieret. Eadem autem dicitur ordinata quia est determinata per aliquam rationem sapientialem libere tamen ad faciendum hoc determinate et non illud’; cf. Thomas Sutton (vel Thomas Wylton), *Liber propugnatorius super I Sententiarum contra Iohannem Scotum* (Venice, 1523), fol. 124^{vb} in E. Randi, *Lex est in potestate agentis* (1986), 135.

1	And it seems it should be considered as directed [power], because it should be related [to the things] that are befitting for God to do and [the things] it is possible for God to do.	<1>
5	The counter-argument: Omnipotence comprises everything that does not involve a contradiction, and this is more than [the things] of [just] directed [power].	<2>

1	Hic primo ostenditur, quod potentia est in Deo. Nam potentia dicitur in ordine ad actum. Sed duplex est actus: scilicet primus, qui est forma, que respondet potentie passive, et operari, quod respondet potentia activa.	<3>
5	Et hec est in Deo: tum quia, ubi est operatio intrinseca et extrinseca, ibi est potentia. Sed in Deo est operatio intrinseca et extrinseca: tum quia secundum Avicennam potentia primo inventa est in hominibus, quia habent vim vincendi. Sed Deus non potest pati ab aliquo, ergo maxime actus.	
V 222 ^{va} ; 1 Hic] gr 115; d 32,20; st 461,10; se 32,7; 2 qui] d 33,1.		
1 1 ^o in marg.; 2 que] quae d, st; 3 potentie passive] potentiae passivae d, st; passive] passiva V; potentia activa] potentie active gr, potentiae activae d, st; 4 hec] haec d, st; extrinseca] ergo add. / del. V, om. gr, d, st, se; 7 habent] habet gr.		
2-5 In Eccl. n. 50 (LW II 278,8-12): ‘per quas agunt secunda agentia, id, quod sunt formae et actus, a deo sunt, qui est primus actus formalis. Adhuc autem ipsae formae, quibus agunt secunda, non possunt moveri ad agendum nisi a deo, utpote a primo motore, sicut, verbi gratia, forma(e) ignis et caloris non possunt calefacere nisi motae a motore caeli’; In Sap. n. 80 (LW II 411,12-412,3): ‘deus est principium omnis motionis sive corporalis sive spiritualis, utpote primum movens; est et principium omnis formalis perfectionis, utpote primus actus formalis qui est esse. Secundum hoc ergo actus creaturae cuiuslibet dependet a deo quantum ad duo: uno modo, in quantum ab ipso habet formam per quam agit, alio modo, in quantum ab ipso movetur ad agendum’; 4-5 Prolog. Gen. in Opus tripartitum n. 17 (LW I 161,3-4): ‘notandum quod omne quod deus creat, operatur vel agit, in se ipso agit et operatur. Quod enim extra deum est et quod extra deum fit, extra esse est et fit’; In Gen. II, n. 131 (LW I 596,4-5): ‘radix, origo et meritum omnis operationis exterioris ab intra est, secundum illud Luc. 17, “regnum dei intra vos est”’; In Ex. n. 52 (LW II 55,12-56,2): ‘Propter forma est causa intrinseca rei. Secus de agente et fine, quae non dant se ipsa substantialiter nec illa respicit materia nec appetit ipsorum substantiam nec per ipsam sui, materiae, esse, naturam. Propter quod agens et finis causae sunt extrinsecae rerum materialium’; Quaest. Par. I, n. 3 (LW V 39,12-40,2): ‘Cum igitur esse in deo sit optimum et perfectissimum, actus primus et omnium perfectio, omnes actus perficiens, quo sublato omnia nihil sunt, ideo deus per ipsum suum esse omnia operatur et intrinsecus in deitate et extrinsecus in creaturis’; 7-8 Sermo XXIX n. 297 (LW IV 264,8-9): ‘Secundo in uno nunquam est dolor sive poena sive molestum, sed nec passibilitas aut mortalitas.’		
1-2 Thom. Aqu., Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 1, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 7: ‘Et primo quaeritur utrum in Deo sit potentia’; Albert the Great, In Dion. De divinis nominibus, ch. 13, n. 27: ‘Deus autem neque terminis terminatum est, quia simplex est, neque esse suum est comprehensum in aliquo, sed est actus purus, absolutus ab omni potentia, non receptus in aliquo secundum esse suum’; 2-8 Thom. Aqu., S.Th. I, q. 25, a. 1, (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888), 290: ‘Unde sibi maxime competit esse principium activum, et nullo modo pati. Ratio autem activi principii convenit potentiae activae. Nam potentia activa est principium agendi in aliud, potentia vero passiva est principium patiendi ab alio, ut philosophus dicit, V Metaphys, Relinquitur ergo quod in Deo maxime sit potentia activa’; Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 1, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 8b-9a: ‘Ad huius quaestionis evidentiam sciendum, quod potentia dicitur ab actu: actus autem est duplex: scilicet primus, qui est forma; et secundus, qui est operatio ... Unde et similiter duplex est potentia: una activa cui respondet actus, qui est operatio; et huic primo nomen potentiae videtur fuisse attributum: alia est potentia passiva, cui respondet actus primus, qui est forma, ad quam similiter videtur secundario nomen potentiae devolutum... Sicut autem nihil patitur nisi ratione potentiae passivae, ita nihil agit nisi ratione actus primi, qui est forma’; 5-7 Avicenna, Liber de Philosophia prima, tr. IV, 2: Avicenna Latinus I, (1977), 193,72-194,75, 196,16-8: ‘Quod intelligitur de hoc nomine potentia, primum imposuerunt intentioni quae est in animalibus, ex qua possunt provenire actiones validae quae sunt de genere motuum, nec sunt saepissime in plerisque hominibus in sua quantitate et qualitate’, ref. in Thom. Aqu., Scriptum Sent. I, d. 42, q. 1, a. 1, sol., (ed.) Mandonnet (1929), 983.		

1	It has to be shown first that [this] power is in God. For, potentiality is spoken of with regard to actuality. But actuality is two-fold: The first actuality, which is the form [of something], relates to passive potentiality and [the second actuality which is] the act [of something],	<3>
5	relates to active potentiality, [which is power]. And this is in God: Both because where there is intrinsic or extrinsic action, then there is power [to bring it about]. But in God there is intrinsic and extrinsic action. [Therefore God has power for intrinsic and extrinsic action]. And, because according to Avicenna, power is firstly found in	
10	men because they have the strength to overcome. But God cannot suffer [at the hands of] anything, therefore God is actuality of the highest degree. [Total power in action].	

1	Sed dices: quomodo ponitur ista potentia in Deo?	<4>
5	Dicendum, quod ₁ secundum quod ₂ invenitur in creaturis, amota imperfectione, ut est ultimum complementi. Item dico, quod ista potentia est una realiter, quia dicitur de omnibus singulariter. Item, essentia est principium emanationum omnium, et ipsa est una. Ergo et cetera.	<5>
V fol. 222 ^{va} ; 1 Sed] gr 115; d 33,6; st 461,17; se 32,14.		
<i>Deut.</i> 32:4; <i>Ps.</i> 8:5; <i>Isa.</i> 40:10-26, 46:5-7; <i>Mal.</i> 3:3; <i>John</i> 17:21-3; <i>Rom.</i> 5:5, 8:32; <i>1Cor.</i> 13:10; <i>Col.</i> 1:15-20; <i>Heb.</i> 1:3; <i>Jas.</i> 1:18.		
2 quod ₂] quid gr; 3 complementi] complimenti gr.		
<p>2-3 <i>In Ex.</i> n. 137 (LW II 125,9-13): ‘Propter quod actio dei perfectissima est et incipit a perfecto, <i>Deut.</i> 32: “dei perfecta sunt opera”. (<i>Deut.</i> 32:4) Propter quod etiam dicitur descendere, <i>Iac.</i> 1: “omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum desursum descendens est”. (<i>Jas.</i> 1:17) Operatio autem naturae sive generatio e converso incipit ab imperfecto, et quo fini est vicinior, tanto perfectior’; <i>Quaest. Par.</i> IV, n. 4 (LW V 73,4-8): ‘Nam aliqua sunt, quae sunt perfectionis, quaedam imperfectionis; nam moveri dicit imperfectionem. Et ideo quanto aliquid magis perfectum, tanto minus de motu et de loco, et quia corpus caeleste est perfectum primo, ideo minime movetur et locatur, sed omnia movet et omnia locat’; 4-6 <i>In Ex.</i> n. 29 (LW II 34, 14-35, 1): ‘Unde Gregorius ait quod omnia in nihilum redigerentur, si non ea manu teneret omnipotentia creatoris’ (Gregory the Great, <i>Morals on Job</i>, 16. 37. 45); <i>In Ex.</i> n. 105 (LW II, 106,9-10): ‘Hoc autem est id, quod deus ipse, utpote causa prima, influit se ipso primo’; cf. <i>De Causis</i> propositio 1 (163,3); <i>In Gen.</i> II n. 3 (LW I 453,9–454,5): ‘adhuc autem et ipsa divinarum personarum sacratissima emanatio cum ipsarum proprietate, distinctione sub una et in una essentia, uno esse, vivere et intelligere, et abinde exemplata et derivata creaturarum productio, et quomodo in omni opere naturae, moris et artis elucet pater ingenitus, filius a patre solo genitus, amor essentialis concomitans et amor notionalis, spiritus sanctus a patre et filio uno principio spiratus seu procedens’; <i>In Gen.</i> II, n. 215 (LW I, 691,2-10, or 439,11-9 in 2015 edition): ‘operationes intellectus sive intellectuales in deo sunt reales processus sive productiones et emanationes et producta sunt quid reale, puta filius et spiritus sanctus. »Ipse enim intellectus« in deo »res est«, similiter et voluntas. Et propter hoc procedens manet in producente et cum producente in unitate essentiae, naturae, esse, vivere et intelligere et huiusmodi, nequaquam cadens vel recedens ab uno nec sub uno, sed sic procedens reali processione est ipsa essentia producentis intra unum, in uno et ipsum unum; procedit enim a producente inquantum produciens unum est. Propter quod sancti optime patri in divinis attribuunt unitatem’; <i>In Ioh.</i> n. 469 (LW III, 12,13): ‘in divinis radicale principium generationis et spirationis est essentia divina’; <i>In Sap.</i> n. 260 (LW II, 592,7-9): ‘Et [<i>De causis</i>] 18 propositione scribitur: “omnes res habent essentiam per primum ens, et res vivae omnes sunt motae per essentiam suam propter vitam primam, et res intelligibiles omnes habent scientiam per intelligentiam primam”’; <i>Sermo XXIV</i> n. 299 (LW IV, 266,7-9): ‘Undecimo, quia deus eo dives profusivus est, quia ‘unus’. Primus enim et supremus est ratione qua unus. Propter quod unum descendit in omnia et singula, manens semper unum et divisa uniens.’</p> <p>2-3 Avicenna, <i>Metaphysics</i> IX c. 2 (103^{ra} 30): ‘perfectio enim causati inferior est perfectione causae agentis.’ Thom. Aqu., <i>S.Th.</i> I, q. 13, a. 2, sol, (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888), 142: ‘Significant enim sic nomina Deum, secundum quod intellectus noster cognoscit ipsum. Intellectus autem noster, cum cognoscat Deum ex creaturis, sic cognoscit ipsum, secundum quod creaturae ipsum repraesentant ... Deus in se praehabet omnes perfectiones creaturarum, quasi simpliciter et universaliter perfectus. Unde quaelibet creatura intantum eum repraesentat, et est ei similis, inquantum perfectionem aliquam habet, non tamen ita quod repraesentet eum sicut aliquid eiusdem speciei vel generis, sed sicut excellens principium, a cuius forma effectus deficiunt, cuius tamen aliqualem similitudinem effectus consequuntur; sicut formae corporum inferiorum repraesentant virtutem solarem ... Sic igitur praedicta nomina divinam substantiam significant, imperfecte tamen, sicut et creaturae imperfecte eam repraesentant. Cum igitur ... id quod bonitatem dicimus in creaturis, praeexistit in Deo, et hoc quidem secundum modum altiorem’; <i>Q.d. De potentia</i>, q. 1 a. 1, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 9a; ‘Sed et sciendum, quod intellectus noster Deum</p>		

exprimere nititur sicut aliquid perfectissimum. Et quia in ipsum devenire non potest nisi ex effectuum similitudine; neque in creaturis invenit aliquid summe perfectum quod omnino imperfectione careat: ideo ex diversis perfectionibus in creaturis repertis, ipsum nititur designare, quamvis cuilibet illarum perfectionum aliquid desit; ita tamen quod quidquid alicui istarum perfectionum imperfectionis adiungitur, totum a Deo amoveatur.’

1	But you will then ask, ‘How is this power in God to be understood? The answer has to be: as that which is found in creatures as ultimate perfection, once the imperfection is removed [from them]. I say also, in reality there is only one power, because it is said that	<4> <5>
5	all things [are done] in a particular [singular] way. Also, [divine] essence is [the] principle [origin] of all emanations, and itself [this essence] is one. Therefore and so forth.	

1	Secundo inquirendum quomodo debet intelligi ista distinctio, scilicet potentia absoluta et ordinata. Nam quando aliqua attribuuntur Deo secundum se, talia pertinent ad potentiam absolutam. Sed quando sibi aliqua attribuuntur secundum comparisonem ad rationem et sapientiam, sic pertinet ad potentiam ordinatam.	<6>
5	Tunc tertio, ad quaestionem dicendum, quod Magister in Sententiis determinat auctoritatibus sanctorum; et videtur dicere quod attenditur secundum utrumque.	<7>
10	Quidam tamen dicunt, quod ex hoc est omnipotens, quia potest facere quidquid vult per se et a se.	<8>
V fol. 222va; 1 Secundo] gr 115; d 33,12; st 461,22; se 32,21; 5 ad] se 33,25; 6 Tunc] st 462,1.		
1 debet] debeat gr, d, se; ista] illa gr; 2° in marg. 2 aliqua] gr, d, se, aliquid V, st, in V error cop.?.; <i>Titulus supra</i> 'a' = taliam, vel 'i'?; 3 sibi] om. gr; 4 attribuuntur secundum] attribuuntur in V; secundum comparisonem] in comparatione st; pertinet] pertinent gr, d, st; error in num. lineae, st scribit 15 versus 25; 6 Tunc tertio] Tertio est gr, Item tertio d; quaestionem] questionem gr, se; 3° et 1° in marg. = sectio 3(1); 8 secundum] om. se; 10 quidquid] quicquid gr. 2° in marg. = sectio 3(2).		
2-3 In Ex. n. 163 (LW II, 142,11-2): 'illud nomen est propriissimum rei, cui competunt et attribuuntur omnia, quae illius rei sunt propria.'		
1-5 Thom. Aqu., <i>Scriptum Sent.</i> III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, resp., (ed.) Moos (Paris, 1956), 36: 'quando potentiae divinae aliquid ascribitur, utrum attribuatur potentiae secundum se consideratae; tunc enim dicitur posse illud de potentia absoluta: vel attribuatur sibi in ordine ad sapientiam et praescientiam et voluntatem ejus: tunc enim dicitur posse illud de potentia ordinata'; 6-8 Peter Lombard, I <i>Sent.</i> d. 42, c. 3 (186) (Grottaferrata, 1971): 'Quod omnipotentia Dei secundum duo consideratur. Hic igitur dili genter considerantibus omnipotentia eius secundum duo apparet, scilicet quod omnia facit quae vult, et nihil omnino patitur. Secundum utrumque Deus omnipotens verissime praedicatur, quia nec aliquid est quod ei ad patiendum corruptionem inferre valeat, nec aliquid ad faciendum impedimentum afferre'; cf. <i>ibid.</i> , c. 1-3, 294-8; I <i>Sent.</i> d. 43, c. 1, 1 (187) (Grottaferrata, 1971): 'Aiunt enim: Non potest Deus aliud facere quam facit, nec melius facere id quod facit, nec aliquid praetermittere de his quae facit'; 9-10 Cf. William of Auxerre, <i>Summa Aurea</i> l. I, tr. 11, q. 6 (Paris and Grottaferrata, 1980), 215,36-8: 'Sed melius dicendum est quod Deus est omnipotens quia potest facere ex se et per se quicquid vult facere', ref. in Thom. Aqu., <i>Q.d. De potentia</i> , q. 1 a. 7, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 23a: 'Quidam etiam dixerunt, quod ideo dicitur [Deus] omnipotens, quia potest quidquid vult; et hoc habet a se et per se'; Augustine, <i>Sermo de symbolo ad catechumenos</i> 2 (CChr.SL 46, 185-6, PL 40, 627), trans. H. Browne, from NPNF (1887): 'Quam multa non potest, et omnipotens est: et ideo omnipotens est, quia ista non potest ... Nam ego dico quanta non possit. Non potest mori, non potest peccare, non potest mentiri, non potest falli. Tanta non potest: quae si posset, non esset omnipotens ... Facit quidquid vult: ipsa est omnipotentia. Facit quidquid bene vult, quidquid juste vult: quidquid autem male fit, non vult. Nemo resistit omnipotenti, ut non quod vult faciat.'		

1	Second, it is to be enquired how this distinction between absolute and directed power should be understood. For when some properties are attributed to God [insofar as he is God], these pertain to absolute power. But when some properties are attributed with respect to his intellect and	<6>
5	wisdom, then these pertain to directed power. Now thirdly, to this question we say what the Master in his Sentences, with the [authoritative] sayings of the saints, determined, and it seems that, according to him, [God's omnipotence] is to be considered as both. [as absolute and as directed power].	<7>
10	Some others say, however, that he is omnipotent because he can do everything he wills by himself and of himself.	<8>

1	Contra. Hoc solum declarat modum potentie. Dico igitur, quod magis attenditur secundum potentiam absolutam, quia debet attendi secundum quod se potest extendere ad omnia que non implicant contradictionem, quia attenditur in ordine ad possibile.	<9> <10>
5	Item: alias potentia Dei esset limitata, si secundum aliqua attenderetur. Item sicut scientia dicitur Dei omnia scientem, quia scit omnia, ita de potentia. Quare autem non dicitur omnia volentem? Responsio: Solum vult illa, ad que applicat suam scientiam vel potentiam.	
10	Et nota quod non dicitur omnipotens, quod in eo sit omnis potentia, sed quia potest facere omne possibile.	
V fol. 222 ^{va} ; 1 Contra] g 115; d 33,21; st 462,5; se 33,30, 5 alias] d 34,1.		
Job 21:22, 36:3-5; 1John 3:20.		
1 potentie] potentiae d; st; ³⁰ in marg. = sectio 3(3). 3 que] quae d; st; 6 sicut] sic st; dicitur Dei] dicimus Deum gr, st; Dei dicitur d; quia scit omnia] del. gr; 6-7 Cf. omnia scientem / omnia volentem] d, st; 7 dicitur] dicimus gr; 8 Responsio] Respondeo gr, d, st. que] quae d, st; 10 quod] quia gr, d, se; sit] p.c. sicut V.		
10-11 In Ex. n. 32 (LW II, 38, 1-2): 'Patet ergo quod deus iuxta nomen "omnipotens" potest omnia et potest quaecumque posse est potentiae.'		
2-4 Thom. Aqu., <i>Q.d. De potentia</i> , q. 1 a. 5, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 18a: 'Praeterea, in Deo duo contradictoria simul esse non possunt. Sed absolutum et regulatum contradictionem implicant; nam absolutum est quod secundum se consideratur; illud vero quod regulatur, ordinem ad aliud habet. Ergo in Deo non debet poni potentia absoluta et regulata'; 5 Thom. Aqu., <i>Q.d. De potentia</i> , q. 1, a. 2, resp. 13, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 12b: 'Ad decimumtertium dicendum, quod Deus semper agit tota sua potentia; sed effectus terminatur secundum imperium voluntatis, et ordinem rationis'; 6-7 (10-1) Thom. Aqu., <i>Q.d. De potentia</i> , q. 1, art. 7, arg. 1, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a; 'Et videtur quod dicatur omnipotens quia simpliciter omnia possit. Sicut enim Deus dicitur omnipotens, ita dicitur omnisciens. Sed dicitur omnisciens, quia simpliciter omnia scit. Ergo et omnipotens dicitur, quia simpliciter omnia potest'; 6-7 Thom. Aqu., <i>Q.d. De potentia</i> , q. 1, art. 7, arg. 5, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: 'Item quaeritur quare Deus dicitur omnipotens et omnisciens, et non omnivolens'; 10-1 Cf. Thom. Aqu., <i>Q.d. De potentia</i> , q. 1 a. 3, resp.5, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 15a: 'Praeterea, omne quod resistit alicui, resistit in ratione alicuius oppositionis. Sed potentiae divinae nihil est oppositum, ut ex supra dictis patet. Ergo ei nihil potest resistere; et ita potest facere omnia impossibilia.'		
2-4 Cf. Hugh de Novocastro, <i>Sent.</i> I, d. 42, q. 2, (ed.) E. Randi, <i>Il sovrano</i> (1987), 135-6, <i>vidi</i> n. 2.		

1	The counter argument: This only explains how [the way in which] power works.	<9>
	Therefore I say it [God's power] is to be considered rather as absolute power because it should be considered insofar as it extends to all things	<10>
5	which do not involve a contradiction, because it is considered as referring to everything that is possible.	
	Also, the power of God would otherwise be limited if we considered it as relating to something.	
10	Likewise, when we refer to God's knowledge, we say that God is omniscient because he knows everything [and] it is also the same when referring to power. [He is omnipotent because he is able to do everything].	
	Now, why is it not said that God is omnivolent? [wills everything?]	
15	In response I say that he only wills those things to which he applies his knowledge or power.	
	And notice that he is not said to be omnipotent because in him would be the power to do everything, but because he is able to do everything that is possible	

1	Ad argumentum dicendum, quod Deus ₁ de potentia absoluta potest Deus ₂ facere que nunc non sunt decentia. Si essent tamen facta, essent decentia et iusta.	<11>
5	Sed dicis: ‘non potest nisi que previdit?’ Dicendum quod, si referatur ad actum, scilicet ‘nisi’, tunc est vera, quia quidquid facit previdit. Sed si referatur ad potentiam, tunc est falsa.	<12>
	Sed dicis: ‘Augustinus in Enchiridio dicit, quod est omnipotens, quia “potest quidquid vult”, non quia potest omnia.’	<13>
10	Dicendum, quod Augustinus ex hoc <habet> ‘vult’, quia inter ‘omnia’ includuntur mala, que Deus non potest. Ideo sic loquitur.	<14>
V fol. 222va; 1 Ad] g 115; d 34,7; st 462,14; se 33,40.		
Ps. 139:1-5, 15-6; Is. 46:9-11.		
1 Deus ₁] om. st; 2 Deus ₂] om. gr, d, se; que] quae d, st; 4 que] quae d, st; previdit] praevidit d, st. 7 Enchiridio] Enchiridion st; 8 quidquid] quicquid se; 9 habet] conj. habet se, om. V, gr, d, st; 10 que] quae d, st.		
1-3 Cf. <i>Proc. Col.</i> I, n. 95 (LW V, 282, 15-283,3): ‘Tota enim perfectio hominis est conformari divinae voluntati volendo quod deus vult et modo quo deus vult, praesertim cum omne quod deus vult et modo quo deus vult quippiam, hoc ipso bonum est illud’; <i>Proc. Col.</i> I, n. 12 (LW V 203,4-12): ‘talī homo ita conformis est divinae voluntati quod ipse vult, quidquid deus vult et illo modo quo deus vult. Et quia deus aliquo modo vult me fecisse peccatum, quia sic impletur voluntas divina “in terra”, hoc est in delictis, “sicut in caelo”, hoc est in benefaciendo ...’; <i>Buch der göttlichen Tröstung</i> (Quint) (DW V 22,5-14).		
2 Cf. Alexander of Hales, <i>Glossa</i> , I, d. 44 (Quaracchi, 1951), I, 448. (cf. n.1 above); 7-8 Augustine <i>Enchiridion</i> c. XXIV, n. 96: CChr.SL 46, 100, 40-1: ‘Neque enim ob aliud veraciter vocatur omnipotens nisi quoniam quidquid vult potest’; cf. Thom. Aqu., <i>Q.d. De potentia</i> q. 1, a. 7, resp. 3, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 22b: ‘Item videtur quod dicatur omnipotens quia potest omnia quae vult: Dicit enim Augustinus in Enchiridion [capit. xcvi]: Non ob aliud vocatur omnipotens, nisi quia quidquid vult, potest’; ‘Non quia potest omnia’ non vidi in Augustine nisi in Thomas; cf. Peter Lombard, I <i>Sent.</i> , d. 42, c. 3, 2 (186). 9-10 Cf. Peter Lombard, <i>Sent.</i> I, d. 42, c. 3, 3 (186) (Grottaferrata, 1971), 296,21-4. ‘Sed ad hoc potest dici quod Augustinus, ubi dicit: “Omnipotens non dicitur quod omnia possit” etc., tam ample et generaliter accepit “omnia”, ut etiam mala includeret, quae Deus nec vult nec potest. Non ergo negavit eum posse omnia quae convenit ei posse.’		

1	To this [first] argument it must be said that out of [his] absolute power God can do things that are not decent now. But if they were done, then they would be decent and just.	<11>
5	But you [may] ask [against this], ‘Can he only do something, if he has foreseen it?’ To this it should be said that, if this ‘if ’ refers to the things he has actually done, then this is true. Because he has foreseen anything he has done. [does]. But if this ‘if’ refers to what he is able to do, then it is false.	<12>
10	But you [may] say [against this] that Augustine in ‘Enchiridion’ states that, ‘he [God] is omnipotent because “he can do everything he wills”, not because “he can do everything”.’	<13>
15	To this it should be said that Augustine says ‘wills’ because by ‘everything’ he also understood to include the evil things that God is not able to do. And that is why he [Augustine] spoke in this way.	<14>

Commentary

Structural overview

The manuscript, Codex Vaticanus Latinus 1086, contains writings derived from the Augustinian, Prosper de Reggio Emilia and are believed to be a collection of *reportationes* from questions in which Prosper had participated during his Parisian studies.³⁵⁸ Among these are six questions now attributed to Meister Eckhart, and although the precise context is not entirely verifiable, there is no doubt that these notes form a significant contribution to understanding both the thinking of Eckhart and something of their context of early 14th century life within the University of Paris. More is known about the collating of manuscripts with Dominican and Franciscan orders than Augustinian and so it is unclear if the writing will have been done by Prosper or under his direction by one of his students. The reason why these questions are found in this particular codex and these folios is a matter for speculation but modern research is definitely able to make plausible suggestions which add to both the background and also the mystery.³⁵⁹

Adding to the uncertainty, there are traces of earlier writing under the main text as well as in the margins and so areas of this folio were wiped at some point and then, at different times, the text of the question, titles, accreditations, notation marks and marginal notes have been added. The lack of clarity within the text is especially compounded by certain erasures in the main columns and margins and even erasures on top of previous erasures, and so these different markings and erasures on the folio have literally smudged the issue

³⁵⁸ See W.J. Courtenay, 'Reflections' (2007), 345-58; A. Kenny, J. Pinborg, 'Medieval Philosophical Literature' (1982), 37-8.

³⁵⁹ For information on the fascinating investigation into the discovery and authentication of Eckhart's Parisian questions see M. Grabmann, 'Neuaufgefundene Pariser Quaestionem Meister Eckharts und ihre Stellung in seinem geistigen Entwicklungsgange: Untersuchungen und Texte' (1927); A. Pelzer, *Codices Vaticani Latini*, 2/i: Codd. 679-1134 (Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Codices manuscript recensiti; Vatican City, 1931); L. Sturlese, Einleitung in Eckhart (*LWI* 2), 455-60, (Stuttgart, 2015); M. Vinzent, 'Questions on the Attributes (of God): Four Rediscovered Parisian Questions of Meister Eckhart' (2012); A. Beccarisi, Eckhart's Latin Works, in *Brill's Companion to Meister Eckhart* (2013), 90-3.

of authenticity. Transmitting information by copying was not always perfect and, also there may have been an agenda behind why certain material was recorded, meaning possible amendments or omissions by the copyist. There is evidence, or at least allegations, of copyists dishonestly revising text in order to produce a copy more palatable to the one paying for the copy, which could include presenting a more acceptable doctrine. Loris Sturlese explains how there are critical erasures in the middle at the top of the folios under investigation, where questions elsewhere are attributed to their master, and instead there is now reference to the particular master in the margin next to the start of their question. The booklet comprising folios 221^r – 228^v may well have been allocated to John Du Mont St. Eloi whose reference has been erased and the space taken up by questions from Jean du Val des Ecoliers, Amodeus (de Castello) and Gérard de Saint-Victor, as well as what we now know as ‘*Questions six to nine* of Eckhart’.

Focussing on *Question six*, the form of the question on this folio is not a dictated *verbatim* copy of the Meister’s words, and, as has been shown, neither a *reportatio*, but seemingly an abbreviation of a master’s copy,³⁶⁰ although it should be noted that this dispute occurred too early for Prosper to have been the master. Either way, there will be a strong correlation between the actual *disputatio*, its re-worked version by the master, and the abbreviation of it. The text is succinct rather than substantial suggesting all that we have is a compressed version of the question as a whole, although it should be noted that the length of these questions is substantial in comparison with many other questions in this manuscript. *Question six* occupies a full column of the manuscript, and before and after this, questions five and seven fill two columns each, while many other questions recorded occupy just a few lines. This suggests that despite this being an abbreviated account, it seems Prosper wished to be both precise and methodical in his reproduction of Eckhart. This points to the importance with which either Eckhart or the content of his *disputationes* were regarded.

When considering the content of a manuscript it must be noted that the practical details are also a source of information. The nature of the velum and even the ink used speak of the reason for such a text being copied, as well as the meaning of the text, and so for the purpose of this investigation, it is important to add that the Augustinian order must have valued the thoughts of Eckhart highly enough to fill this space on these folios with this

³⁶⁰ See M. Vinzent, ‘Meister Eckharts lateinische Texte, überlieferungsgeschichtlich gelesen – am Beispiel seiner Pariser Quästionen’ (2016), 131-3.

text. The structure of these notes suggests the sequential passage through a series of propositions with counter propositions, solutions and reasoning. This particular question resembles his first *Parisian Question* and so may be considered to be typical of the nature of an abbreviated question, but also more specifically of Eckhart, and although all we have is the abbreviation, the form is such that the actual *disputatio* can still be imagined. Considering the structure is helpful in considering the main question, although of prime importance to this investigation is gaining the thrust of Eckhart's thinking, and any structure suggested can only be a reflection of the notes as they have been transferred to this manuscript.

In looking to reproduce the flow of the text, the paragraph numbers are retained as presented by the critical edition of Loris Sturlese published in the year 2015. The commentary below follows the order of the text with these paragraph numbers because they reflect the notes as they are recorded. Some of the propositions or arguments fit more than one label because of the complexity in Eckhart's thinking, or at least these notes. I have used the terms proposition, argument, counter argument, question and solution although not all paragraphs are simply an argument, question, proposition, solution or counter. Two different labels 'argument' and 'proposition' present a statement rather than a question and are employed mainly to help clarify the structure. The two responses to the main question are labelled as 'propositions' and the three responses to the main question that are referred to by the text and correspondingly marked as such in the margin are labelled as 'arguments'. Likewise the label 'counter' is used to reflect the different uses of '*sed*' and '*contra*' in the text and the oscillating nature of the treatment. Following the main question through paragraphs one to fourteen presents the following questions, propositions, solutions, arguments and counter arguments:

Table 1: The text as it functions

	Content	Latin Text
Q6	Main Question	Utrum omnipotentia, que est in Deo, debeat attendi secundum potentiam absolutam vel secundum potentiam ordinatam?
n. 1	Proposition 1	Et videtur, quod secundum ordinatam, quia debet attendi secundum quod decet Deum facere, et secundum ea, que potest facere.

n. 2	Counter Proposition 1	Contra: Omnipotentia respicit omnia que non implicant contradictionem, et hec sunt plura quam ordinata.
n. 3	Main Question 1 st Argument	Hic primo ostenditur, quod potentia est in Deo. Nam potentia dicitur in ordine ad actum. Sed duplex est actus: scilicet primus, qui est forma, que respondet potentie passive, et operari, quod respondet potentia activa. Et hec est in Deo: tum quia, ubi est operatio intrinseca et extrinseca, ibi est potentia. Sed in Deo est operatio intrinseca et extrinseca: tum quia secundum Avicennam potentia primo inventa est in hominibus, quia habent vim vincendi. Sed Deus non potest pati ab aliquo, ergo maxime actus.
n. 4	Main Question 1 st argument Sub-Question 1	Sed dices: quomodo ponitur ista potentia in Deo?
n. 5	Solution Sub-Question 1	Dicendum, quod secundum quod invenitur in creaturis, amota imperfectione, ut est ultimum complementi. Item dico, quod ista potentia est una realiter, quia dicitur de omnibus singulariter. Item, essentia est principium emanationum omnium, et ipsa est una. Ergo et cetera.
n. 6	Main Question 2 nd Argument	Secundo inquirendum quomodo debeat intelligi ista distinctio, scilicet potentia absoluta et ordinata. Nam quando aliquid attribuitur Deo secundum se, talia pertinent ad potentiam absolutam. Sed quando sibi aliqua attribuitur secundum comparisonem ad rationem et sapientiam, sic pertinet ad potentiam ordinatam.
n. 7	Main Question 3 rd Argument	Tunc tertio, ad quaestionem dicendum, quod Magister in Sententiis determinat auctoritatibus sanctorum; et videtur dicere quod attenditur secundum utrumque.
n. 8	Counter n. 7	Quidam tamen dicunt, quod ex hoc est omnipotens, quia potest facere quidquid vult per se et a se.
n. 9	Counter n. 8	Contra. Hoc solum declarat modum potentie.
n. 10	Solution Main-Question, (Counter Proposition 1) Sub-Question 2, Solution Sub-Question 2	Dico igitur, quod magis attenditur secundum potentiam absolutam, quia debet attendi secundum quod se potest extendere ad omnia que non implicant contradictionem, quia attenditur in ordine ad possibile. Item: alias potentia Dei esset limitata, si secundum aliqua attenderetur. Item sicut scientia dicitur Dei omnia scientem, quia scit omnia, ita de potentia. Quare autem non dicitur omnia volentem? Responsio: Solum vult illa, ad que applicat suam scientiam vel potentiam. Et nota quod non dicitur omnipotens, quia in eo sit omnis potentia, sed quia potest facere omne possibile.

n. 11	Counter nn. 1 and 8	Ad argumentum dicendum, quod Deus de potentia absoluta potest Deus facere que nunc non sunt decentia. Si essent tamen facta, essent decentia et iusta.
n. 12	Counter n. 11 Sub-Question 3, Solution Sub-Question 3	Sed dicis: ‘non potest nisi que previdit?’ Dicendum quod, si referatur ad actum, scilicet ‘nisi’, tunc est vera, quia quidquid facit previdit. Sed si referatur ad potentiam, tunc est falsa.
n. 13	Counter n. 12	Sed dicis: ‘Augustinus in Enchiridio dicit, quod est omnipotens, quia “potest quidquid vult”, non quia potest omnia.’
n. 14	Counter n. 13	Dicendum, quod Augustinus ex hoc <habet> ‘vult’, quia inter ‘omnia’ includuntur mala, que Deus non potest. Ideo sic loquitur.

The main issue is approached by the introductory question at the head of the text and then placed in the context of the debate of a power distinction based on whether God acts out of absolute or directed power. This distinction was not held by Eckhart but he was keen to show how it had been wrongly understood. N. 1 presents the first proposition that God’s omnipotence should be considered as *ordinata* because God can only do what is *decens* or alternatively, the counter proposal is presented in n. 2 that God is able to do more than what is *decens* for him to do, and in fact everything that does not involve a contradiction, and therefore *potentia* should be considered as *absoluta*.

To bring his own thoughts into the debate, the Meister states in n. 3 that, the first point to be made, is this power is in God, both in essence and action. This statement then leads to a question of how this power should be understood in n. 4 which is answered with a threefold explanation of power in n. 5.

The next block of paragraphs re-introduce the question of the power distinction, n. 6, and this is framed, firstly, by presenting that how the distinction should be understood is a matter of perception and then, secondly, in the light of previous treatments. N. 7 presents the thought of there being both absolute and directed power as perceived by Lombard and other authorities and then in n. 8 another opinion is given, based on the emphasis of God’s will, which from the evidence of the following text, could be a reference to Augustine or maybe even a pointer towards Thomas . N. 8 does not directly refer to Proposition 1 but when considering the views of Augustine across the text, Eckhart seems to wish to emphasise the connection between the will of God and directed power. Marginal markings also link n. 9 to n. 7 and n. 8 likewise suggesting that this proposition deals with power, whether directed or absolute, or both, in action rather than essence.

Having presented that there are those who consider God's power as directed, and some who consider it to be both directed and absolute, Eckhart in n. 10 states that it should be considered as absolute, in accordance with the argument of n. 2, labelled as 'Counter Proposition 1'. This leads into the closing set of statements which swing between Proposition 1 and its Counter Proposition, with particular focus on how the will of God has been perceived as limiting the power of God to do everything that is actualised. The notion of not involving a contradiction from n. 2 is revisited in n. 10 and the need to be fitting, from n. 1, alongside being just, is considered in n. 11. These issues were treated by Thomas in his *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia Dei* and earlier in Lombard's *Sentences* and Eckhart uses similar language here to make comparison inevitable, as he also does when introducing the question of foresight in n. 12 which also provides a solution that suggests that by incorporating this issue of perception, Counter Proposition 1 is appropriate. Finally, further thoughts on the will of God from Augustine's *Enchiridion* are considered in nn. 13 and 14.

The text contains what can be taken as three sub-questions but there is effectively only one main question of, 'how the omnipotence of God should be considered', and likewise, the proposals, arguments and counter points can be simplified because there is effectively only one issue of, 'when considering this omnipotence, whether one should differentiate between the *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*' There is not enough material in the text to confirm a clinically clear structure but this 'best-fit' attempts to simplify the outline of the treatment that Eckhart was aiming to achieve.

Complexity maybe increases arises because the Meister, in his own thinking, does not acknowledge the distinction and he is rather presenting his thoughts on how others perceive a distinction. For Eckhart, God possesses absolute power, and as given in the solution block of nn. 3-5, God acts absolutely. This however does not mean that any action is not directed and so Eckhart is careful to incorporate the *ordinata* within his notion of *absoluta*, even if this is less obvious from the text. This connects the idea that power is absolute, as in n. 2, with the idea that the distinction shows that power is both, as in n. 7. When considered as power there is unlimitedness, and when considered as action, which is only relevant from the human perspective, God acts absolutely, but not without direction.

The text therefore produces the following hierarchical flow-chart:

Table 2: Hierarchical flow-chart

			Q6	Main Question	‘How one should consider omnipotence in God’
1-14	1-2	1.2	1	Proposition 1	<i>Ordinata, decet.</i>
			2	Counter Proposition 1	<i>Absoluta, non - contradictione.</i>
	3-14	3.4,5	3	Main Question 1 st Argument	‘This power is in God’.
			4	Main Question 1 st argument Sub- Question 1	How is power to be understood?
			5	Solution Sub-Question 1	Perfect, singular, emanating.
		6	6	Main Question 2 nd Argument	How the distinction should be understood?
		7.8,9	7	Main Question 3 rd Argument	Master, Saints, say both.
			8	Counter n. 7	Others say, ‘everything he wills’.
			9	Counter n. 8	‘Only’ explains how power works.
		10.11-4	10	Solution Main-Question, (Counter Proposition 1) Sub-question 2, Solution Sub-Question 2	‘I say absolute’, everything, non-contradiction, not-limited, why not-omnivalent?
			11	Counter nn. 1 and 8	Would be <i>decet</i> and just.
			12	Counter n. 11 Sub-Question 3, Solution Sub-Question 3	Only foreseen? If... things or able.
			13	Counter n. 12	Wills, everything. (Augustine)
			14	Counter n. 13	‘Everything’ includes evil.

This shows there is an introductory section, and a response to the notion of power and how it should be understood before considering the power distinction with a series of ideas that are proposed and either countered or upheld. In answer to the main question, mixed in among the opposing sides of the distinction is a dynamic revelation of Eckhart's notion of how God's omnipotence should be considered, but this is found in the propositions, counter propositions and arguments as well as the paragraphs labelled as solutions. Nn. 3-5 are not isolated but feed into the distinction and, by dealing with power from both a human and divine perspective, glue the treatment together. This section of teaching slotted in after the introductory propositions is vital in understanding Eckhart's treatment of the distinction in the proceeding paragraphs.

Another factor, to be considered is the large amount of material surrounding the main text. There are writings in the margins above, below and to the side of the text of *Question six* and early inspection suggests there are connections with, although they are unlikely to have been part of, the initial script. Interestingly there are references and quotes from others, notably Anselm, and Duns Scotus with notes on omnipotence and *distinction* 44 of the *Sentences*, which is a key text for the power debate. On closer inspection, the writing style of these marginal notes reflect that of a late 15th century hand, and so are likely to be further additions from around a hundred years after the question was added to the folio. The dating, authorship and purpose of the notes is unclear, though it seems this material, or most of it, does connect thematically with the question.

There are also characters in the margin, denoting some elements of the question's structure which could have been added to the folio either earlier or with the question but do seem to be in the margins independent of the extra notes that are present. Following the main question, initial and counter proposals, in the left hand margin, adjacent to n. 3, which begins, '*hic primo*', there is a 1 with the abbreviation character for '*us*' above it, therefore denoting *primus*. Lower down in the margin adjacent to n. 6 there is the corresponding character for '*secundus*' and adjacent to the next paragraph a character denoting '*tertius*'. The third point also denotes three sub-points with the corresponding numbers 1, 2 and 3 with an 'm' above the figure to present the abbreviation for *primum*, *secundum* and *tertium*. These markings cannot be totally unrelated to the question as they match specific points in the text although this could mean as little as pointing to their corresponding word. To this extent they inform something of the structure of the question although they are also possibly to be simply regarded as an *aide mémoire* for the copyist.

The text of the *Question* does not follow a simple pattern unveiling the Meister's thoughts on omnipotence or the omnipotence debate. Coming from a *disputatio* it typically uses a series of arguments, (or propositions), and responses although there is not the simple treating of one issue followed sequentially by another, but rather an inter-weaving of arguments and solutions in response to the main question which is typical for late scholastic texts, e.g. Hervaeus Natalis and William of Ockham. This being the case, the text flows effectively, although arguments being visited and re-visited obviously leads to a certain amount of repetition. This, maybe, was typical of the Meister's pedagogic style or alternatively, it reflects the best attempt at abbreviating and subsequent matching of the different arguments contained. *Question six* is not simply the linear discussion of one argument and so this commentary, by moving through the text systematically, inevitably reflects something of the incorporated repetition. It is not that the treatment spirals towards a climax but that the various aspects related to the overall subject are revisited and a clearer image of the whole picture emerges as the text proceeds.

Q6 Whether omnipotence which is in God should be considered as absolute power or as directed power?

Having recorded the development of the question of God's omnipotence within the history of philosophical theology in Part I, it is helpful now to explore the context of this question within the works of the Meister. The historical significance of the context for airing this particular question is covered in chapter one and it should be acknowledged that within the text, while there are references to earlier treatments of connected issues, there seems to be no direct reference to any of the political or canonical concerns raised by, what had been, the smouldering context.³⁶¹ Other treatments do seem to have been given with a suggestion of either theological implication or practical application but

³⁶¹ For applications of the distinction in Part I see Johannes Bassolis, *Super I Sent.*, d. 44, q. un. (Paris, 1517), fol. 213^{vb}; John of Naples, *Quaestiones variae disputatae*, q. 3, punctum 3, ad. 3; q. 36, punctum 2, p.313; John Duns Scotus *Ordinatio*, I, d. 17, qq. 1 et 3; I, d. 44 (Vatican edition, vol. VI 363-9); William of Ockham, Quodlibeta septem VI, q. 1 (*Opera Theologica* vol. IX [St. Bonaventure, 1980], 585-6), *Summa logicae* III, 4, c. 6 (*OP* I, 779-80), Tractatus contra Benedictum III 3, in H.S. Offler (ed.), *Opera Politica* III (Manchester, 1956), 233.

although the text of *Question six* may have inferences to other issues, these are not obvious from this record.

The clear ordering of these so called ‘re-discovered questions’, dating from Eckhart’s second magisterium around 1311-3 AD, suggests that this is not a set of random questions, typical of a *quodlibet*, but a series of developed arguments presented in the *quaestiones disputatae* of a master. These were the opportunity to develop thinking on a doctrinal issue by using a question, argument and response format. Alternatively, it may be that Prosper, or whoever was writing the notes on his behalf, was being systematic in developing a strand of thought based on the theme of the questions. The development of thought within these questions prove that their ordering is not random and, either way, it is helpful to consider the juxtaposition of this question on God’s power.

As a twice Master of Theology in Paris, Meister Eckhart must have held a number of different *quodlibeta* and *disputationes* yet relatively few questions from these have been identified. The first three questions, generally accepted as authentic, are found on the Avignon, Bibliothèque Municipale Codex Ms. 1071, which would place them within Eckhart’s first magisterium, 1302–3 AD. More significantly, *Questions four* and *five* precede the four new questions in Vat. Lat. 1086 (although *Question four* is several folios earlier), which means they should be dated within the second magisterium and therefore are worth considering in order to appreciate the context of Eckhart’s treatment of the power distinction.

Table 3: The questions attributed to Eckhart on Vat. Lat. 1086.

Question Number	Latin Text	Vat. Lat. 1086 Folio
4	<i>Utrum aliquem motum esse sine termino implicet contradictionem?</i>	143 ^r
5	<i>Utrum in corpore Christi morientis in cruce remanserint formae elementorum?</i>	222 ^{r-v}
6	<i>Utrum omnipotentia, que est in Deo, debeat attendi secundum potentiam absolutam vel secundum potentiam ordinatam?</i>	222 ^v
7	<i>Utrum essentia Dei esset actualior quam proprietas?</i>	222 ^v – 223 ^r

8	<i>Utrum diversitas esset relatio realis vel rationis?</i>	223 ^{r-v}
9	<i>Utrum differentia secundum rationem sit prior quam differentia secundum rem?</i>	223 ^v – 224 ^r

Question six is found at the top of folio 222^v and the previous question, ‘Whether in the body of the dying Christ on the cross, the forms of the elements remain?’³⁶² begins folio 222^r with the inscription above the question, ‘M. Aycardus’, attributing this work to Eckhart. As with the question on omnipotence, this is also a contribution to an ongoing question, with this one considering the form of the elements of something in comparison with the form of the whole entity. Eckhart gives his thoughts to this Christianised idea of the hylomorphic (matter – *hyle* and soul – *morphé*) system of Aristotle, alongside other key mediaeval contributions such as that from Duns Scotus, who maintained the form of the soul is different from the form of the body and informs the body during life before separation at death.³⁶³ Alternatively Ockham emphasised the actuality of the forms of the elements making up the whole such that when the organism dies, the corpse is both specifically and numerically the same body as the body of the living organism. Eckhart presents, as he does in his *Prologue to the Book of Propositions*, how the form of something is derived from the whole:

Individual parts contribute absolutely no existence to their whole;
rather they receive their total existence from their whole and in their
whole.³⁶⁴

³⁶² Eckhart, *Quaest. Par.* V, n. 4 (LW V 77,1-2), see Table 3, *Quaest. Par.* trans. here and following A. Maurer (1974).

³⁶³ See *Master Eckhart, Parisian Questions and Prologues*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Armand Augustine Maurer (1974), 26-8; T.M. Ward, ‘Animals, Animal Parts, and Hylomorphism: John Duns Scotus’s Pluralism about Substantial Form’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 50:4 (2012), 531-58; A.J. Cascardi, *The Cambridge introduction to Literature and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2014), 128; M. McCord Adams, *William Ockham* (Indiana, 1987), 633-70.

³⁶⁴ Eckhart, *Prolog. in Opus Propositionum* n. 18 (LW I 176,15-177,1): ‘*partes singulae nullum esse prorsus afferunt suo toti, sed potius totum suum esse accipiunt a suo toto et in suo toto.*’ Trans. A. Maurer (1974).

Maurer summarises Eckhart saying, ‘in the process of dying, everything happened to Christ as to other men: the difference lay in the fact that throughout his dying and at his death his complete human nature, soul and body, remained united to his divine person.’³⁶⁵ The Meister, having considered form and matter in *Question five*, also refers to the idea of forms in *Question six* and further considers the form of God further in *Question seven*. Before this, it should be noted that *Question four*, ‘Whether motion without end implies a contradiction?’³⁶⁶ is attributed to ‘M. Ayerdus’ above the question, and found on the same manuscript but on the earlier folio, 143^r. The reason why this isolated question appears on this particular folio is unclear but it might relate to the academic year, 1311-2 AD while the ones on the later folios are from the following year 1312-3 AD. Rather than illuminate any contextual idea, it confirms that alongside the other questions there is a sequential expression of Eckhart’s thinking. In this question, as with *Question five*, Eckhart considers a problem from Aristotle’s *Physics*³⁶⁷ and likewise concludes any motion implies a start or terminus. However, rather than merely a physical issue, Eckhart presents how the heavens and especially the first heavenly sphere (or the subject of motion, the first mobile body), dominates and controls the whole natural order, and its movement is intended to serve the well-being of the whole universe.³⁶⁸ Eckhart states that motion without terminus would deny motion, however there is the idea that to be set in

³⁶⁵ A.A. Maurer, *Master Eckhart, Parisian Questions and Prologues* (1974), 28.

³⁶⁶ Eckhart, *Quaest. Par.* IV, n. 4 (LW V 74,1-3), ‘Item est unus motus, et movetur per partes, non per centrum; nam est primum mobile ab immobili quod est in ipso, quia hoc est perfectionis; ideo debet moveri in se, non in centro.’ For recent discussion on this question see M. Vinzent, ‘Eckhart on Space and Time’ (2016).

³⁶⁷ For *Question four* see Aristotle *Phys.* VI, 6, 236b 33, *Metaph.* IX (14, 1049b 35); for *Question five* see *Phys.* III (Γ c. 6, 207^a 13), *Metaph.* VII (Z c. 6, 1033^b 17).

³⁶⁸ See *Parisian Questions*, A.A. Maurer (1974), 24-6; Thom. Aqu., *In XII Metaph.* Lect. 9, n. 2558. This “ninth” orb or sphere of which St. Thomas speaks was postulated by the astronomers to account for the motion which the celestial pole was discovered to be describing every 36,000 years. Since it encompassed all the other spheres, it was considered to be a ninth or outermost sphere, and therefore the first in order of all the spheres; See Q.d. *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 5, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 140a-5b.

motion denotes imperfection in contrast with the perfect, immobile power,³⁶⁹ who sets in motion. The threads in *Question four* concerning potentiality apart from actuality, or power not related to motion, the idea that the power of God is perfect in contrast with the imperfection found in creatures, that the first (mobile body) has only one uniform movement and also grammatical use of the tool of contradiction,³⁷⁰ all connect with *Question six*.

Following *Question six*, on the adjacent side of folio 222^v, is a question looking at the essence of God, ‘Whether the essence of God is more real than the property?’³⁷¹ Eckhart considers how the power of God to generate is his absolute active potentiality, and so this marks a clear link by developing the notion of God’s power in *Question six*. The problem raised is that, if God does not extend his power to generate to the Son when the Son is generated, then the Son is less powerful and therefore secondary to the Father. Eckhart emphasises throughout that the Father’s act of generating the Son is not through him being Father, but out of his very essence of being God. And so, because they share the same essence, the Father and Son are both able to generate and share the same power such that the Son could generate the Father. This answer is paralleled by Eckhart in his *Commentary on Exodus* and therefore, with consecutive questions on Vat. Lat. 1086 corresponding to consecutive paragraphs in the *Commentary*, this very much strengthens the case that these questions were from the same *disputationes* and present a developing argument.

Further evidence for the authorship of these questions comes from Latin *Sermo XXVIII*, ‘he has done everything well’ (*Mark* 7:37), in which there are consecutive paragraphs corresponding to *Questions five* and *six*.³⁷² As the comments later on n. 1 and n. 11 present, these contain the provocative idea that God could make *decens* what is not *decens* now, or in other words, God could make something that is indecent, or unbefitting but for

³⁶⁹ See Eckhart, *Quaest. Par.* IV, n. 4 (LW V 73, 4-8): ‘*Nam aliqua sunt, quae sunt perfectionis, quaedam imperfectionis; nam moveri dicit imperfectionem. Et ideo quanto aliquid magis perfectum, tanto minus de motu et de loco, et quia corpus caeleste est perfectum primo, ideo minime movetur et locatur, sed omnia movet et omnia locat.*’

³⁷⁰ See Aristotle, *De caelo et mundo* II t. 35 (B c. 6, 288, a 11, seq.).

³⁷¹ Eckhart, *Quaest. Par.* VII (LW I/2 463,1-2), see Table 3.

³⁷² Eckhart, *Sermo XXVIII* (LW IV 252–62); See M. Vinzent, ‘Questions on the Attributes’ (2012), 179-82. *Lectura Eckhardi* 4 (2011–2).

God it would be decent and fitting. This is noticeable because the content between the sermon and the question are parallel and it is in contrast with the thoughts on this issue by Thomas and Henry of Ghent.³⁷³ Also significantly, there is a parallel between *Sermo XVIII* and *Parisian Question five* with a consideration of Aristotle's *Physics* that 'being pertains to the whole and not to a part.'

And more than authenticity, these parallels between the questions and his Latin *Commentaries*, by extending to his sermons, prove that Eckhart incorporated the same notions of his doctrine in the various means of expression. As Markus Vinzent explains, it is not just the ordering of these questions within the questions and their parallels elsewhere, but the nature of, and manner in which the arguments are developed sequentially that is striking.

Question six was therefore neither random nor unimportant for Eckhart as seen by its context with his other questions and also because this was the second time he dealt with the omnipotence debate in Paris. Certainly parts of his *Commentary on Exodus* date from his first magisterium in Paris around, 1302-4 AD,³⁷⁴ but the discussion of the question of God's omnipotence as part of a treatise on divine names seems to have been introduced after the delivery of the present 'new' questions. This can be seen from the different literary nature (with absence of Scriptural references, for example) of the section of the *Commentary* that has parallels to the *Quaestiones* and the rest of the text which follows closely the pattern of Eckhart's other scriptural commentaries. The question of omnipotence is found in paragraph 27 and paralleled in *Question six*, the issue of the power of generating in the Father is covered by paragraph 28 and paralleled in *Question seven* and the issue of relation is covered by paragraph 62 and paralleled in *Questions eight* and *nine* with the example of whiteness featuring in *Questions seven* and *eight*.³⁷⁵ Inference of the power distinction is made to introduce a block of commentary dealing with the almightiness of God from the text of *Exodus* 15:3,³⁷⁶ the Song of Moses after

³⁷³ See Henry of Ghent, *Quodlib.* XI 2; Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3; *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 1, r, also Grabmann, 'Neuaufgefundene Pariser Quaestionen Meister Eckharts', 358.

³⁷⁴ See L. Sturlese, The Origins of the Opus Tripartitum in, *The Brill Companion to Meister Eckhart*, (2013), 125-35.

³⁷⁵ See M. Vinzent, 'Questions on the Attributes' (2012), 180.

³⁷⁶ See *Exod.* 15: 1-22 for the songs of Moses and Miriam.

God had rescued his people from the hands of the Egyptians. Eckhart points to the proposal that God can do everything, or alternatively:

How scripture, the theologians, and the saints say that there are some things that God cannot do.³⁷⁷

The comments in this portion of commentary show several parallels with *Question six* and are a critical reason why these ‘rediscovered questions’ must be attributed to Meister Eckhart.³⁷⁸ The context of the action taking place in the book of *Exodus* is the backdrop to a discussion about the power of God, and how God actualises this power, and also how limitations to God’s power are sometimes perceived. This is an on-going exploration but something of Eckhart’s thinking on power can be gleaned by examining these two treatments from Paris as the two clearest explanations, known so far, on this aspect of theology. The nature of the power of God naturally features in other works of Eckhart, and for example, of similarly recent interest, the newly discovered ‘Troyes fragment’³⁷⁹ considers the extent of God’s power in relation to infinity, and therefore holds a strong connection to *Question six*.

n. 1 And it seems it should be considered as directed [power], because it should be related [to the things] that are befitting for God to do and [the things] it is possible for God to do.

n. 2 The counter-argument: Omnipotence comprises everything that does not involve a contradiction, and this is more than [the things] of [just] directed [power].

With this recurring question forwarded, and being a *disputatio*, possibly done so in advance, Eckhart’s audience should have been familiar with earlier treatments, as noted

³⁷⁷ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 27 (LW II 32,6-8): ‘*et secundo quomodo in scriptura et a doctoribus et sanctis dicatur deus quaedam non posse.*’ trans. here and following B. McGinn and F. Tobin (1987).

³⁷⁸ See M. Vinzent, ‘Questions on the Attributes’ (2012), 179-81.

³⁷⁹ A text of Eckhart has been identified in the margin of a manuscript from Clairvaux, now held at the Centre régional de documentation, University of Troyes, France. This has been transcribed by Pater Senner OP and published in LW I/2, 2015. See *Tagung Deutscher Thomismus im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert. Ergebnisse der Forschung und neue Perspektiven*. Freiburg i. Br., 28.-30. Januar 2010. For the fragment of Eckhart, manuscript: Troyes, Médiathèque de l’Agglomération Troyenne, cod. 269, fol. 85^v, marg. inf. with an English translation, M. Vinzent, ‘Questions on the Attributes’ (2012), 182-4.

in Part I, and also the place held by this particular debate in dealing with ecclesiastical issues. Eckhart refers to Augustine and Lombard directly but although there is no mention of Thomas by name, there is little doubt that the Meister's audience would be making the connections with the works of Thomas, and soon noticing parallels with the thinking of Aquinas and especially the *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei*. Maybe they were even more attentive in eagerly watching out for any difference between the 'Angelic Doctor' and the enigmatic Eckhart who often began from the starting point of Thomas before venturing into uncharted territory. It was not unusual practice to start from the position of the key player in the field and by the start of the 14th century, due appreciation of Aquinas, as the standard for orthodoxy, was not just accepted, but expected. Both meisters lectured on the *Sentences* in Paris, and so both would have been well aware of the distinction on power in this standard mediaeval theology text, and therefore parallels with Lombard, who referred largely to Augustine, are also inevitable.³⁸⁰

Having introduced the question of omnipotence with the '*utrum*', Eckhart begins his setting out of the debate raised quite conventionally with '*et videtur*', and thereby suggesting the door to questioning is being opened. He moves to the first argument by proposing, also quite ordinarily, that God's power must, 'it seems', be considered as '*ordinata*'. The *potentia ordinata* to this point had generally been considered as the power associated with the things God wills to do and therefore actually does, with *ordinata* accordingly being translated as 'ordained'. This idea picks up the threads from Augustine, and in the narrowest sense, Abelard, that the *ordinata* contains everything that God could do, because, if it is his will to do something, and the will of God cannot be thwarted, then the extent of God's power is seen in the way he does everything that is actualised. A second option for translation, recognises that in philosophical argument, if anything is not taken as 'absolute' then it should be regarded as being 'related' to something. Power therefore could be seen as either general potentiality, in which case absolute, or

³⁸⁰ Investigating *Question six* reveals several parallels with different works of Eckhart's predecessors but the connections with those of Thomas Aquinas are worth particular consideration. Many of the parallels naturally come with the Thomas' *Q.d. De potentia* which is a more substantial work than *Question six*. For a side by side view of parallels between *Question six* and various texts of Thomas see Appendix iv, Comparison between Eckhart Q6 vs Thomas Aquinas. Lombard's writings, in particular, *Sentences*, *Book 1*, *distinctions* 41-4 are featured in Part I: Scholastic advances.

potentiality related to action. Translating *ordinata* as ‘related’ would emphasise the idea of power other than in a general sense by pointing to the things that are actualised by power, but this would be without any inference of how that power is being exercised. In the recently published edition of the *Questions*, *ordinata* has been translated into German by the word *geordnetes* and so emphasising the notion that these are the precise actions of God.³⁸¹ *Potentia ordinata* has therefore been translated using a third option of ‘directed’ power, because this combines all three ideas of being within the will of the one exerting power, while referring to the actual things being done, and importantly, accentuating that this power is operational. This first proposal of the text wraps up omnipotence as power with the actions it does, therefore ‘directed power’ is a dynamic term matching the view of Eckhart emerging throughout the question, portraying his thought of not separating power as an abstract concept from what it actualises.

The Meister explains this proposal with two criteria reflecting the *ordinata*, as the need for God’s actions to be fitting and to be possible. For God, to only do the things that are befitting for him to do could maintain that he simply does as he wills, but *decens* is used to present something that seems decent or becoming, therefore also suggesting that God acts according to his nature. God does the things that are right for God to do, as echoed by the German translation, *angemessen*,³⁸² and these are the actions that are appropriate for him to do according to his essence, the nature of his being. In n. 11 *decentia* has been translated ‘decent’ in English and *gehörig*³⁸³ in German, again emphasising that these actions relate to God and are true to his nature. Eckhart uses the similar term *convenit* in his *Commentary on Exodus*, when inferring the power debate, to describe how power belongs properly to God and this use simply relates to God as being almightiness.³⁸⁴ This treatment from Eckhart is in the context of God being able to do everything or otherwise, and Thomas also describes the importance of the nature of God when actions are determined:

³⁸¹ Eckhart, n. 1 (LW I/2 717,1), trans. here and following L. Sturlese, W. Senner and M. Vinzent.

³⁸² Eckhart, n. 1 (LW I/2 717).

³⁸³ Eckhart, n. 11 (LW I/2 717).

³⁸⁴ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 27 (LW II 32,4-6): ‘primo quod omnipotentia proprie deo convenit et ipse solus potest omnia: “omnipotens”, ait, “nomen eius” - circa primum videndum quomodo deus possit omnia.’

Now God is act both pure and primary, wherefore it is most befitting to him to act and communicate his likeness to other things: and consequently active power is most becoming to him.³⁸⁵

The term *convenit* was used by Abelard to explain why God can only do what he does, (and now do what he always could do)³⁸⁶ but Thomas does not use the term in such an exclusive sense. Here it has been translated as befitting and becoming, to propose that, as seen earlier in chapter one, if something is *convenit* for the Father then it must be *convenit* for the Son.³⁸⁷ This idea connects with the thoughts of Alexander of Hales, who uses the term ‘*debet*’ in his gloss on Lombard’s *distinction* 44 to state that, although it could be possible for the Father to assume flesh, it would not be fitting, or seemly.³⁸⁸ Alexander proposes that something might be possible but not befitting, and thereby distinguishing between the *potentia ordinata* and *absoluta*, and Eckhart concurs, that according to this proposal, for something to be directed, it must be both possible and befitting. This is not a question of the extent of God’s power but the idea of a self-imposed limitation.

In the proceeding counter argument, Eckhart introduces the *absoluta* by proposing that God does everything possible and these things exist because they do not involve a contradiction. As with others before, there is no disagreement with the principle that two things that comprise a contradiction cannot happen. The term ‘*implicat*’, has been translated ‘involved’ because the more literal translation, ‘implied’ points simply to the action, whereas the idea of involving, suggests containing within either the action, or the subject of the action, which relates more closely to the idea of directed power. Likewise, in German *einschließt*,³⁸⁹ adds the element of enclosing rather than just pointing to the action. In this case then, if something cannot be done, there is a contradiction contained within the proposition of possibility.

³⁸⁵ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 1, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 9: ‘*Deo autem convenit esse actum purum et primum; unde ipsi convenit maxime agere, et suam similitudinem in alias diffundere, et ideo ei maxime convenit potentia activa.*’

³⁸⁶ See Peter Abelard, *Introductio ad Theologiam* III, 5 (PL 178, col. 1103-4; CCCM 13,527), see appendix ii.

³⁸⁷ See Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3 (1956), 36 footnote 260.

³⁸⁸ See Alexander of Hales, *Glossa*, I, d. 44 (1951), I, 448, footnote 216.

³⁸⁹ Eckhart, n. 2 (LW I/2 717).

Eckhart gives further clarification in his *Commentary on Exodus*, in which the question of the things that are possible for God to do is raised in connection with the term omnipotence, which implies simply that God has the power to do everything, and that it is beyond suggestion that God could lack the power to do anything. He breaks the Latin term down into the two parts of *omni* and *potent* to explain how God has power to make whatever is among everything that is or could be.³⁹⁰ God has power for all things, therefore it is appropriate to call God ‘Omnipotent’ and because God is active power in his substance, this is expressed in directed action.³⁹¹ Stating how God has power over everything that exists the Meister proposes:

‘Every agent has natural power over those things, and solely over those things through itself which are contained under the form which is the principle of the agent’s action. Being, however, is the principle of every divine action. Therefore God has power over everything that is or can be... Hence the fire that in its sphere is right next to the moon’s sphere does not act upon it and does not touch it, although it is touched by it.’³⁹²

Fire is then used as an illustration by showing that it will burn everything it is brought into contact with that can be burnt, although there may be things that don’t burn, such as the Moon. An agent can only act on things within the sphere of activity that it is able to

³⁹⁰ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 30 (LW II 36,11-4): “‘*Omnipotens*’ duo dicit: *omnia et potentia, potens omnia, potens omnium. Quae ergo sunt de numero omnium, illa potest. Iterum quae posse est potentiae, illa potest. Quae vero nec sunt in numero omnium et quae posse non est posse sed potius non posse, illa non potest.*’

³⁹¹ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 27-78 (LW II 32,2-82,8). See Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 7, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 22b: ‘*Septimo quaeritur quare Deus dicatur omnipotens*’, for Lombard *distinction* 42 see note 163.

³⁹² *In Ex.* n. 28 (LW II 32,9-12... LW II 32,14-33,3): ‘*omne agens potest naturaliter in omnia illa et sola illa per se, quae continentur sub forma, quae in ipso est principium actionis. Sed esse est principium omnis actionis divinae. Igitur deus potest omnia quae sunt et quae esse possunt... Ignis enim calefacit calore, et propter hoc agit in omnia calefactibilia et per se in nihil aliud, quod non sit capax caloris et formae ignis. Propter quod ignis, in sua sphaera immediatus orbi (lunae), in ipsum non agit, sed nec tangit physice ipsum, licet tangatur ab illo.*’

do, and therefore God, as existence, is the creator of everything that merely exists and has power over everything that is, and yet more than this, everything that could be. Thomas asked the same question in his *Q.d. De potentia*, following Lombard who asked the question in *distinction* 42.³⁹³ There is some pointer to a distinction here because, whereas fire is limited in its action to only burning certain things, God, whose form is his being acts from his being and could do even more than what is, if it possibly could be, and hence possesses absolute power. Nothing else could act on everything that is, let alone everything possible.

In his *Commentary* Eckhart deals with the way the term ‘omnipotence’ has led to the notion that there are things God cannot do, or rather that the ‘*vulgaris*’, or common people, suggest there are things that God does not have power over.³⁹⁴ He points out that omnipotence is truly power over everything and that because nothing and everything are mutually opposed, to have power over nothing is to have no power at all. Anything that is not subject to God’s power is a kind of nothing, does not exist and belongs to impotency rather than potency. This includes anything involving a contradiction and anything evil which are two ideas featuring later in this treatment (nn. 10, 13, 14). Eckhart explains something cannot exist at the same time as that which contradicts it and God cannot do evil because it does not fall within the things that exist and so it is a nothing. In both cases for God to have power over such non-beings would suggest a failing in God’s power and therefore be a mark of impotency rather than potency. Also, God could not hold any defect or indeed deny himself, which is the thought used by others such as Augustine on this issue taken from the text of Paul’s *Letter to Timothy*.³⁹⁵ Eckhart connects here with Thomas stating that God’s power extends to things that are possible in themselves, meaning all the things that do not involve a contradiction,³⁹⁶ and also, as seen in chapter one, that God, within his *ordinata* would not do anything that involved a contradiction in

³⁹³ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* nn. 32-3 (LW II 38,8-39,2).

³⁹⁴ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 30 (LW II 36,7).

³⁹⁵ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 32-3 (LW II 38, 8-39, 2), also *2Tim.* 2:13, footnote 121.

³⁹⁶ See Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q1, a. 7, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 23a-b; see also *Scriptum Sent.* I, d. 42, q. 2, a. 2, sol., (ed.) Mandonnet (Paris, 1929), 991; John Duns Scotus, *Reportatio Parisiensis* iv, d. 1, q. 5, L. Wadding edition (Lyons, 1639).

the current order, but these things may be possible, *absoluta*, in a different order.³⁹⁷ This argument and the extent to which Eckhart concurs with Thomas is expanded later in *Question six* and at this stage the Meister is simply stating where developments have reached.

The counter argument, therefore, to the idea that the power of God should be considered as that through which God could only do what is befitting and possible, out of the *potentia ordinata*, n. 1, presents the notion that things could be done, out of *potentia absoluta*, n. 2, and this power is only restricted by the question of whether or not the thing could possibly exist. This idea that God does everything that is possible, seems to be common to both arguments, therefore the further constraint, that he can only do the things are appropriate for him to do, is the reason why there are more things that can be done *absoluta* than *ordinata*. This is an expression of the power distinction. Eckhart has summarised the omnipotence debate by presenting the two sides of the issue, such that either God's power should be seen as that which is able to do everything possible, *absoluta*, or everything that is possible and that is also *decens*, and thereby within his nature, or essence, as God, *ordinata*.³⁹⁸ The proposal and counter proposal have suggested there are two constraints, or filters on the actions of God. One considers how 'everything' is different from 'everything possible' and this is based on the need for there to be no contradiction involved and can be designated the restriction, or filter of 'logical possibility'. The second constraint is based on any action being *decens* and this can be designated the filter of 'moral possibility'. This idea had featured earlier in the power debate when Alexander of Hales used both terms, *decere* and *posse*, to present a distinction between *ordinata* and *absoluta*.³⁹⁹ These two filters of limitation introduced in the first two paragraphs are central to the arguments raised throughout *Question six*. The counter argument of n. 2, dealing with the issue of doing everything possible that does not involve a contradiction, is specifically considered in n. 10, and the first argument, the limitation of being *decens*, features in n. 11.

³⁹⁷ See Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, (ed.) Moos (1956), 38, footnote 270.

³⁹⁸ See Hugh de Novocastro, *Sent.* I, d. 42, q. 2, (ed.) E. Randi, *Il sovrano e l'orologiaio: due immagini di Dio nel dibattito sulla "potentia absoluta" fra XIII e XIV secolo* (Florence, 1987), 135-6 See W.J. Courtenay *Capacity and Volition* (1990), 116.

³⁹⁹ See Alexander of Hales, *Glossa*, I, d. 44 (1951), I, 448, see footnote 216.

n. 3 It has to be shown first that [this] power is in God. For, potentiality is spoken of with regard to actuality. But actuality is two-fold: The first actuality, which is the form [of something], relates to passive potentiality and [the second actuality which is] the act [of something], relates to active potentiality, [which is power]. And this is in God: Both because where there is intrinsic or extrinsic action, then there is power [to bring it about]. But in God there is intrinsic and extrinsic action. [Therefore God has power for intrinsic and extrinsic action]. And, because according to Avicenna, power is firstly found in men because they have the strength to overcome. But God cannot suffer [at the hands of] anything, therefore God is actuality of the highest degree. [Total power in action].

In n. 3, the Meister begins to step from his introduction and the main thrust of historical treatments towards his own radical solution by focussing on the nature of power and explaining firstly that God's possesses all power. Or more precisely, all power that is, is in God. The previous paragraph began with '*et videtur*' and two ways that power could be perceived, but there is no pointer to uncertainty here and no thought of distinction, but the expression of power being in God, and taking this a step further, God himself, as being total power itself.

The notes, and indeed the marginal note, emphasise that this is the first point to be considered and therefore not unimportant. The distinction cannot be thought of without the notion of omnipotence in action and so this paragraph presents power in a different way. It had always been thought, that if something could be done, then God has enough power to do it, but Eckhart connects with Avicenna, and thereby Albert and Thomas, by considering power firstly in its essence, or potentiality, as a quantity with the potential to achieve something irrespective of whether or not that something exists. These notes of *Question six* seem an abbreviation in comparison with the substantial record of Thomas in the *Q.d. De potentia* when, in article one he asks if there is power in God,⁴⁰⁰ and there are eighteen following arguments and a solution presenting that God is indeed power, and this is God in essence, which matches the relatively succinct solution given by Eckhart. The Meister explains that actuality, or what actually is, or happens, comprises of passive potentiality which is just from the form of something and active potentiality, or power, which relates to action. This explanation of actuality is not original and can be found in Thomas:

⁴⁰⁰ See Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 1, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 7a.

I answer that to make the point at issue clear we must observe that we speak of power in relation to act. Now act is twofold; the first act which is a form, and the second act which is operation... Wherefore in like manner power is twofold: active power corresponding to that act which is operation - and seemingly it was in this sense that the word 'power' was first employed: - and passive power, corresponding to the first act or the form, - to which seemingly the name of power was subsequently given.⁴⁰¹

Eckhart does amplify this notion of power in his *Commentary on Exodus*,⁴⁰² saying the form of God, as God, possesses all potentiality before any action is conceived, and so this form expresses Being, or Existence as God,⁴⁰³ who both is, and is capable of all action possible. But God is not simply capable of all action possible, as pure being, God is existence and therefore holds the power for all that exists, or could exist, the total actuality which is both passive and active. Just in his very form, God is passive potentiality, and in the things he does, all his actions, he is active potentiality. Eckhart describes how God is potentiality in himself and so, whether just passive or active, this is not just contained by God as one of his attributes among others, but this is the nature of God. With the terms established, two reasons are given why all potentiality is in God. Firstly the Meister employs the logical sequence that if there is action, then there must be power to bring this

⁴⁰¹ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 1, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 8b-9a: '*Respondeo. Ad huius quaestionis evidentiam sciendum, quod potentia dicitur ab actu: actus autem est duplex: scilicet primus, qui est forma; et secundus, qui est operatio: et sicut videtur ex communi hominum intellectu, nomen actus primo fuit attributum operationi... Unde et similiter duplex est potentia: una activa cui respondet actus, qui est operatio; et huic primo nomen potentiae videtur fuisse attributum: alia est potentia passiva, cui respondet actus primus, qui est forma, ad quam similiter videtur secundo nomen potentiae devolutum... Sicut autem nihil patitur nisi ratione potentiae passivae, ita nihil agit nisi ratione actus primi, qui est forma.*' See Albert, *In I Sentences*, d. 35B, art. 3, ad. 4, 5, (ed.) Borgnet, 26: 183-4, footnote 227.

⁴⁰² See Eckhart, *In Ex.* 15:3, n. 28 (LW II 32,9-12... LW II 32,14-33,3).

⁴⁰³ For the first proposition that 'Existence is God', *Esse est deus*", see Eckhart, *Prolog. Gen. in Opus tripartitum* n. 12, (LW I/2, 29,16-31,9), also *In Gen.* II, n. 131 (LW I 596,4-5), *Quaest. Par.* IV, n. 4 (LW V 73,4-8).

action about. As he states in his *Prologus generalis in Opus tripartitum*, God is active within himself and also outwardly, and therefore, because in God there is both intrinsic and extrinsic action, then there must be power. prologe

Here it should be noticed that everything God creates, works or does, he works or does in himself. What is outside of God and is made outside of him, exists and is made outside of existence.⁴⁰⁴

God being the source of action is stated in the first *Parisian question*:

Now God's existence is most excellent and perfect, being the primary actuality and the perfection of all things, bringing all acts to completion, so that if it were removed everything would be reduced to nothing. So God does everything through his existence, both intrinsically in the Godhead and extrinsically in creatures.⁴⁰⁵

The truth of God's existence means that there is actuality, and by his very nature, God is involved in both intrinsic and extrinsic activity, or rather, *is* both intrinsic and extrinsic activity. This passage proposes not just that God is involved in all actuality, but all that activity would be reduced to nothing if God were not active, meaning that without the existence and thereby activity of God, there is nothing. In his comments on *Ecclesiasticus* the contrast is again made that all action is from the 'First Mover' and anything that does move, does so because of the 'heavenly mover'.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ Eckhart, *Prolog. Gen. in Opus tripartitum* n. 17 (LW I/2 33,21-3): '*notandum quod omne quod deus creat, operatur vel agit, in se ipso agit et operatur. Quod enim extra deum est et quod extra deum fit, extra esse est et fit.*' Trans. here and following A. Maurer (1974).

⁴⁰⁵ Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. I*, n. 3 (LW V 39,12-40,2): '*Cum igitur esse in deo sit optimum et perfectissimum, actus primus et omnium perfectio, omnes actus perficiens, quo sublato omnia nihil sunt, ideo deus per ipsum suum esse omnia operatur et intrinsecus in deitate et extrinsecus in creaturis.*'

⁴⁰⁶ Eckhart, *In Eccl.* n. 50 (LW II 278,8-12): '*per quas agunt secunda agentia, id, quod sunt formae et actus, a deo sunt, qui est primus actus formalis. Adhuc autem ipsae formae, quibus agunt secunda, non possunt moveri ad agendum nisi a deo, utpote a primo motore, sicut, verbi gratia, forma[e] ignis et caloris non possunt calefacere nisi motae a motore caeli.*' trans. here and following B. McGinn and F. Tobin (1987). See also *In Sap.* n. 80 (LW II 411,12-412,3), *In Ex.* n. 52 (LW II 55,12-56,2).

Likewise, as seen in *Parisian Question four* earlier, using Aristotelian logic, the fact that there is action points to *being put into action*, and so from Eckhart's perspective, this first mover is the 'one', and the 'actualising Being'. This activity is described in *Sermo XXV*, when Eckhart refers to the *bullitio* and *ebullitio* as the boiling up action within God and the active boiling over of himself into every other thing:

God as good is the principle of "boiling over" on the outside; as personal notion he is the principle of the "boiling within himself," which is the cause and exemplar of the "boiling over."⁴⁰⁷

God in his essence is active within himself in principle, and so this is intrinsic action, yet also God actively boils over and this is extrinsic action. God is the active boiling source of everything that exists and so power is both in God in essence and in action.⁴⁰⁸ There is no mere passive potentiality here as the emphasis is on action with the adjectival sense of boiling rather than merely sitting or simmering. This is dynamic activity, and again there is more added with the idea of not merely boiling, but boiling over. Power is not just resting in God, not just dynamically active within God, but explosively burgeoning in overflowing activity.

The second reason given affirms that there is no greater power than God by making the comparison between God and man, to accentuate the extent of this power. Man is seen to have power because of his actions, and this is to be regarded as strength because man overcomes something. Yet power in man is compared with that in God. One man will be the strongest man, but not for ever, and will eventually be weaker than another. God in his nature cannot suffer at the hands of anyone or anything that exists, and cannot fail, and cannot be denied anything that is within his will. Therefore there is no greater power

⁴⁰⁷ Eckhart, *Sermo XXV* n. 258 (LW IV 236): '*deus sub ratione boni est principium ebullitionis ad extra, sub ratione vero notionis est principium bullitionis in se ipso, quae se habet causaliter et exemplar[iter] ad ebullitionem.*' Trans. B. McGinn and F. Tobin (1987).

⁴⁰⁸ McGinn notes that Eckhart introduces three scholastic terms important for the early development of the sermon: (1) *quod quid est*, the Aristotelian term that signifies the "quiddity," or "whatness" of a thing; (2) *id quod est*, or "what it is," a Boethian term; and (3) *quo est* indicating God, existence itself as the source of all things. See *Teacher and Preacher* (1986), 221.

possible and neither no-one, nor nothing external to God, with power greater than God as Eckhart states here in a sermon describing the oneness of God:

In the One there is never pain, punishment or distress, nor ability to suffer or die.⁴⁰⁹

The contrast is absolute between being vulnerable to total suffering or possessing total power. Thoughts from Avicenna,⁴¹⁰ which are also cited by Thomas emphasise that whatever power there is in man, then it is greater in God and this trails all the way back to the Hebrew concept of *Sabaoth*,⁴¹¹ the one able to overcome any challenge and defeat any enemy physical or spiritual. We know about power because it is present in man as part of creation but the extent of our power points to frailty in comparison with the all-surpassing omnipotence of God. This is not a statement about the question of potentiality but reinforcement of the point just given above that God is active and could not possibly be passive. To be actively passive would mean being able to suffer at the hands of a different power and this would be inconsistent with the notion of being total power. Passive potentiality is not being passive, but the potential to be active. In English terms, the *maxime actus* of Eckhart or *maxime sit potentia activa* of Thomas, means that power is total, ultimate and maximum and there is simply no greater power that exists or could possibly exist. This is not just the potential power that could be available to use, but absolute, actualising power, therefore God is declared to be total power, the maximum and ultimate active (and passive, being careful not to say potential in this statement), actuality.

The comparison between Eckhart and Aquinas is apparent in presenting the nature of the actuality in God. Thomas states:

Whence it most fittingly belongs to Him to be an active principle, and in no way whatsoever to be passive. On the other hand, the notion of active principle is consistent with active power. For active power is the

⁴⁰⁹ Eckhart, *Sermo XXIX* n. 297 (LW IV 264,8-9): ‘*Secundo in uno nunquam est dolor sive poena sive molestum, sed nec passibilitas aut mortalitas.*’ Trans. B. McGinn and F. Tobin (1987).

⁴¹⁰ See Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia Prima*, tr. IV, 2: *Avicenna Latinus I* (ed.) S. Van Riet (1977), S, 193,72-194,75, 196,16-8 ref. in Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* I, d. 42, q. 1, a. 1, sol., (ed.) Mandonnet (1929), I 983.

⁴¹¹ For the idea of *Sabaoth* see Part I, ‘The Sovereign God of Israel’, 5-6.

principle of acting upon something else; whereas passive power is the principle of being acted upon by something else, as the Philosopher says (*Metaph.* v, 17). It remains, therefore, that in God there is active power in the highest degree.⁴¹²

For Thomas, as with Eckhart, it is effectively impossible for God to be ‘acted upon’, by anything external but there is a subtle pointer to a clear difference in the thinking of the two with regards to the relationship between God as creator and his creation. Both acknowledge there is nothing outside of God in principle. Thomas, however, places a distinction between God and man in that God does not possess the physicality to be measured and if even he did then he would still be other than creation. Alternatively Eckhart uses the Neo-Platonic notion of the participation of the creator in creation to emphasise the oneness of God in everything that comes from God and that nothing is outside of God because God includes and pre-contains all being at once.⁴¹³ Thomas allows for the participation of God with creation but Eckhart expresses the active participation of God from within creation. This is an example of why it is important to consider how the two masters may not be expressing the same point despite using identical terms. In other words Thomas considers God as both transcendent and immanent, unknowable and present but for Eckhart, God’s immanence is an expression of transcendence. He expresses this in Middle High German:

That a word flows out and yet remains within is certainly marvellous.
That all creatures flow out and yet remain within is a wonder. What
God has given and what he has promised to give is simply marvellous,
incomprehensible, unbelievable. And this is as it should be; for if it
were intelligible and believable, it would not be right. God is in all

⁴¹² Thom. Aqu., *S.Th.* I, q. 25, a. 1, (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888), 290: ‘*Unde sibi maxime competit esse principium activum, et nullo modo pati. Ratio autem activi principii convenit potentiae activae. Nam potentia activa est principium agendi in aliud, potentia vero passiva est principium patiendi ab alio, ut philosophus dicit, V Metaphys. Relinquitur ergo quod in Deo maxime sit potentia activa.*’ Text and trans. in Thomas Gilby, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Blackfriars edition), vol. 5 (London, 1967). See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* v 17 for the notion of ‘limit’.

⁴¹³ See Eckhart, *Pr.* 21, 363 (DW I 7-8), *Prolog. in Opus propositionum*, n. 169 (LW I 6-8).

things. The more he is in things, the more he is outside the things; the more within; the more outside; the more outside, the more within.⁴¹⁴

Eckhart is using seemingly paradoxical language in his typical way of presenting a profound idea, and indeed by saying ‘*daz ist gar wunderlich*’ he is acknowledging this is a mystery. There is no suggestion of any pantheistic notion of God being everything, but the attempt to explain, as elsewhere in *Predigt 9* and his *Sermons and Lectures on Ecclesiasticus*, how God is both within and beyond everything, and that also in terms of power, this is the one singular action, which the Meister continues to unveil in n. 5. Therefore this is not so much a paradox, the simultaneous assertion of opposites presenting something wonderful to comprehend, but the use of two ostensibly contradictory truths in dialectical reasoning as a means of pointing towards God’s incomprehensibility.⁴¹⁵

n. 4 But you will then ask, ‘How is this power in God to be understood?’

n. 5 The answer has to be: as that which is found in creatures as ultimate perfection, once the imperfection is removed [from them].

I say also, in reality there is only one power, because it is said that all things [are done] in a particular (singular) way.

Also, [divine] essence is [the] principle [origin] of all emanations, and itself [this essence] is one. Therefore and so forth.

With the verdict that God is total power in action, Eckhart then suggests by the ‘*sed*’ that it is consequential, once being made aware of this power of God, to want to know how this power should be understood. What follows is the key presentation of Eckhart’s notion

⁴¹⁴ Eckhart, *Pr.* 30, (DW II 94, 1-7): ‘Ez ist ein wunderlich dinc, daz ein dinc ûzvliuzet und doch inneblîbet. Daz daz wort ûzvliuzet und doch inneblîbet, daz ist gar wunderlich; daz alle crêatûren ûzviezent und doch inneblîbent, daz ist gar wunderlich. daz got gegeben hât und daz got gelobet hât ze gebenne, daz ist gar wunderlich und ist unbegrîfelich und unglouplich. Und dem ist reht; wan wære ez begrîfelich und wære ez glouplich, so enwære ez niht reht. Got ist in allen dingen. Ie mê er ist in den dingen, ie mê er ist ûz den dingen: ie mê inne, ie mê ûze, und ie mê ûze, ie mê inne.’ Trans. B. McGinn and F. Tobin (1987).

⁴¹⁵ Eckhart, *Pr.* 9 (DW I 141-58); *In Eccl.* n. 54 (LW II 282,13-283,14); M. Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment*, Eckhart: Texts and Studies, vol. 1 (Leuven, 2011), 244-5; O. Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian* (London, 1991), 113.

of omnipotence and so it is essential that something of his philosophical shaping is incorporated as background to this section. Likewise it should be noted that the reasoning presented in the text relates to the treatise on divine names in his *Commentary on Exodus*, and therefore, although not referred to directly, the concept of a name is integral to this reasoning, and included here to reflect the parallels between the two. There are also several references to Thomas in this section, because it is in n. 5 that key differences between the two masters become evident. While this is not so clear from the text of *Question six*, the ideas, inferred by the astute employment of certain words in the text, are expressed more fully in Eckhart's other works. One of the difficulties of discerning the difference between Eckhart and Aquinas is that, especially in the text of this question, similar terms and format are used by Thomas so it is essential to explore if there are different implications behind certain words. These differences could be due simply to the time gap between the two masters, because meanings of terms evolve over time, or maybe, and more likely, it is because each wanted to convey a particular idea.

The format of *Question six* and development of the argument suggests the key to understanding Eckhart comes in n. 5, because this is where he clearly expresses his thoughts on omnipotence, and builds on the n. 3 notion that omnipotence is in God, the *maxime actus*. N. 5 is a three-statement revelation of God's power, and while the format of the whole text is similar to that of any typical *disputatio* question structure, this paragraph is outstanding, in the context of the background question of the distinction, as a clear synopsis of the Meister's thinking.

The first of these three statements about the power of God presents the comparison made between God and creatures when using the idea of perfection. The power of God has to be seen as the power to be found in creatures through the action of replacing imperfection with perfection. This is an issue of distinction from God, because where there is indistinction from God there is perfection and oneness, whereas imperfection points to distinction, and so the move to perfection from imperfection speaks of the return to oneness with God. Secondly the emphasis is made that there is only one power, therefore all things are done in one way, and everything that is done bears the mark of the one doing it; i.e. God is seen in all action because it is one singular action and he is the power doing the action. Thirdly, building on the second point, all things have emanated from the one

principle and therefore are the outpouring of the one divine essence. God, as one, is the unity of essence and the essential unity we comprehend in emanating activity.⁴¹⁶

To find the core of the understanding Eckhart is seeking to communicate, it is helpful to consider how he embraced the philosophical tool of analogy, especially in his doctrine on the unity of God, as a pointer towards God:

Again note ... that these three are to be distinguished: “the univocal, the equivocal and the analogous. Equivocals are divided according to different things that are signified, univocals according to the various differences of the [same] thing.” Analogous things are not distinguished according to things, nor through the differences of things, but, “according to the modes [of being]” of one and the same simple thing. For example, one and the same health that is in an animal is that [and no other] which is in the diet and the urine [of the animal] in such a way that there is no more of health as health in the diet and urine as there is in a stone. Urine is said to be “healthy” only because it signifies health, the same in number, which is in the animal, just as a circular piece of wood which has nothing of wine in it [signifies] wine.

Being or existence and every perfection, especially general ones such as existence, oneness, truth, goodness, light, justice and so forth are used to describe God in an analogical way. It follows from this that goodness and justice and the like [in creatures] have their goodness totally from something outside to which they are analogically ordered, namely God.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ See T. Tsopurashvili, The Theory of Transcendentals in Meister Eckhart, in *Brill's Companion to Meister Eckhart* (2013), 196-203.

⁴¹⁷ In *Eccl.* n. 52-3 (LW II 280,5-281,5): ‘*Rursus nono advertendum quod distinguuntur haec tria: “univocum, aequivocum et analogum. Nam aequivoca dividuntur per diversas res significatas, univoca vero per diversas rei differentias, analoga” vero non distinguuntur per res, sed nec per rerum differentias, sed “per modos” unius eiusdemque rei simpliciter. Verbi gratia: sanitas una eademque, quae est in animali, ipsa est, non alia, in diaeta et urina, ita quod sanitatis, ut sanitas, nihil prorsus est in diaeta et urina. non plus quam in lapide, sed hoc solo dicitur urina sana, quia significat illam sanitatem eandem numero quae est in animali, sicut circulus vinum, qui nihil vini in se habet. Ens*

The differences between equivocity, univocity and analogy are presented to provide a framework helpful when considering the relation between God and man. Nothing is added to the idea of being equivocal, suggesting that God and man are not simply different things and it is how univocal and analogous relations can be applied that is of more importance here. Analogy is not based on difference or similarity, but on the different modes of the same thing. In the parallel passage from his *Exodus Commentary*, Eckhart introduces these ideas in connection with Aristotle's ten categories, and reducing them to just the two in God, of essence and relation, refers to modes of existence, in connection with modistic ideas, applied by Albert as seen above in chapter one. Of the two examples described the urine conveying health is from Thomas⁴¹⁸ but the wooden garland signposting wine is more peculiar to the Meister.⁴¹⁹ Although urine does not contain health in itself, and the wood does not contain wine, they signpost towards health and wine respectively. By analogy, creation is nothing of itself, but it is a signpost to the one who possesses all attributes. Creation receives the being, nature and perfections of its creator, who is outside of creation, meaning creation is dependent on its creator for its own existence. McGinn, with a quote of Dietmar Mieth, explains that this passage also highlights the difference between Eckhart and Aquinas:

autem sive esse et omnis perfectio, maxime generalis, puta esse, unum, verum, bonum, lux, iustitia et huiusmodi, dicuntur de deo et creaturis analogice. Ex quo sequitur quod bonitas et iustitia et similia bonitatem suam habent totaliter ab aliquo extra, ad quod analogantur, deus scilicet.' See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 54 (LW II 58,1-60,5); Thom. Aqu. *De Principiis Naturae*, c. 6, 46.

⁴¹⁸ See Thom. Aqu., *S.Th.* I q. 16, a. 6, (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888); *S.c.G.*, I, 34, 1-6, (ed.) Leon (Rome, 1918). For background on how Thomas uses analogy see G.P. Rocca O.P., *Speaking the Incomprehensible God, Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, 2004), 93-134, including a critique of analogy, 93-103.

⁴¹⁹ The wreath or garland was a common sign above the door of a tavern in mediaeval Germany, and indeed it still is. For a contemporary example: The Fichtekränzi Tavern in Frankfurt, founded in 1849, bears a logo of a ring consisting of twisted branches of spruce, or in German, *Fichte*. For many hundred years, in Frankfurt and the surrounding area, this has been indicating that this is an apple wine tavern and apple wine is served here. See also Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 64 (LW II 69,2-4).

Therefore, analogy does not indicate some kind of sharing of God and creature in a predicate (e.g. *esse*), but rather denotes the fact that God alone really possesses the attribute. As Dietmar Mieth puts it: Analogy is not, as with Thomas, a connective relationship, but a relationship of dependence; analogy does not explain what something is, but where it comes from. The reality of creatures in Eckhart's doctrine of analogy is the reality of a sign pointing to God.⁴²⁰

In order to emphasise the oneness of God and his creation, Eckhart shows that creatures have nothing of themselves and remain in God.⁴²¹ God is inside man and man is inside God and so anything predicated of man comes from inside, and points to the source of this predicate, who is God. Relative perfection in man signposts the inner and mutual dependence between himself and the one who is truly perfect, and so this is an analogous relation, because this is the same perfection although seen in the two modes of human and divine.

Thomas, however, used analogy to present how God as the creator can be seen in created beings which have their own being and are distinct from the creator, who as fullness of being has given them being. God possesses attributes, such as goodness, in their perfections, whereas creatures possess these attributes because they are given them by God, and so the attributes reflect God but in a creaturely way. This system of analogy

⁴²⁰ B. McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (2001), 92; D. Mieth, *Die Einheit von Vita Activa und Vita Passiva in den deutschen Predigten und Traktaten Meister Eckharts und bei Johannes Tauler* (1969), 136. Eckhart referred to Thomas using univocal, equivocal and analogous terms to solve certain arguments as part of his defence in Cologne in order to align himself with orthodoxy. "Documents Relating to Eckhart's Condemnation" are in McGinn, *Essentials* (1981), 75.

⁴²¹ See J. Hackett and J. Hart-Weed, 'From Aquinas to Eckhart on Creation, Creature and Analogy' (2013), 228; This article traces recent developments on Eckhart and Analogy by: R. Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (1978), 172-80; F. Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (1986), 34-77; A. de Libera, *Le Problème de l'être Chez Maître Eckhart: Logique et Métaphysique de L'Analogie* (1980), 1-63; B. Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity and Unity* (2001); B. McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (2001). See also O. Davies, *Mystical Theologian* (1991), 99-125.

used by Thomas involves ‘intrinsic participation’ and emphasises the reality of God as God, and the reality of man as an identity who is like God because he is an effect of God and dependent on God as the cause of all creation.⁴²² Thomas therefore uses analogy to present distinction between God and man, but Eckhart uses analogy and also univocation to signify indistinction, and this is best seen in the generation of the Son. Eckhart explains this relation in his *Commentary on John’s gospel*:

The son, or Word is the same as the Father or Principle is. This is what follows, “The Word was God.” Here it must be noted that in analogical relations what is produced derives from the source, but is nevertheless itself. Still, insofar as it is in the principle, it is not other in nature or other in supposit. A chest in the maker’s mind is not a chest, but is the life and understanding of the maker, his living conception. On this account I would say what it says here about the procession of the divine Persons holds true and is found in the procession and production of every being of nature and art.⁴²³

The example of a chest to its maker explains how it exists in the maker and insofar as it remains just in the mind of the maker, it is the maker and not a chest, and this pattern of procession and production holds true for every being of nature and art. Once produced, then it is a chest in itself, however much it signposts its maker in the same way that fallen man is still in the image of God.⁴²⁴ It is explained that in analogical relationships, what

⁴²² See B. Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being According to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. E.M. Macierowski, Pol Vandewelde and Andrew Tallon, Marquette Studies in Philosophy 25 (Milwaukee, 2014), 44.

⁴²³ Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n. 6 (LW III 7,10-8,5): ‘*quod sit id ipsum filius sive verbum, quod est pater sive principium. Et hoc est quod sequitur: ‘deus erat verbum’. Ubi tamen et hoc notandum quod, licet in analogicis productum sit descendens a producente, est tamen sub principio, non apud ipsum. Item fit aliud in natura, et sic non ipsum principium. Nihilominus tamen, ut est in illo, non est aliud in natura, sed nec aliud in supposito. Arca enim in mente artificis non est arca, sed est vita et intelligere artificis, ipsius conceptio actualis. Quod pro tanto dixerim, ut verba hic scripta de divinarum personarum processione doceant hoc ipsum esse et inveniri in processione et productione omnis entis naturae et artis.* Trans. here and following E. College and B. McGinn (1981).

⁴²⁴ See *Gen.* 1: 26-7.

derives from the source is something in itself but this would mean the Son would be inferior to the Father therefore:

In things that are analogical what is produced is always inferior, of lower grade, less perfect and unequal to its source. In things that are univocal, what is produced is always equal to the source. It does not just participate in the same nature, but it receives the total nature from its source, in a simple whole and equal manner... A son is one who is other in person but not other in nature.⁴²⁵

The idea of a univocal relation is expanded to explain how the second person of the Trinity is both God in nature yet separate in personhood. This idea, when adapted to consider the relation between God and man, proposes the attributes that man possesses are not just possessed by God but are God and remain in God. Although man is inferior analogically and different with regards to him being a creature to his creator, he is no different univocally, because man is of the one source God and God remains in man as his source. Creation is other than its creator if looked at analogically, but they are not different by nature. As Frank Tobin concludes,

Creatures have no being, unity, truth or goodness in themselves as creatures. God is their being, unity, truth and goodness.⁴²⁶

By considering God as *esse absolutam*, pure intellect, or principle, then everything else is *esse hoc et hoc*, ‘this and that being’ and so there are two types of being and therefore distinction.⁴²⁷ However from the idea that God is the source, then created beings pre-exist in God and so there is indistinction and therefore a univocal relation. Outside of time, oneness with God is seen as univocal and within time, man as separate from God, is a pointer to God by analogy but with the awareness of the unseen univocity that is the basis

⁴²⁵ Eckhart, *In Joh.* n. 5 (LW III 7,4-9): ‘*Ubi notandum quod in analogicis semper productum est inferius, minus, imperfectius et inaequale producenti; in univocis autem semper est aequale, eandem naturam non participans, sed totam simpliciter, integraliter et ex aequo a suo principio accipiens... Filius est enim qui fit alius in persona, non aliud in natura.*’

⁴²⁶ F. Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (1986), 45.

⁴²⁷ See M. Enders, ‘Meister Eckhart’s Understanding of God’ (2013), 359 - 87; ‘*Deus est unus omnibus*’ (2011), 109-36.

for Eckhart's analogy. Eckhart shows that what is created is analogically an imperfect version of its creator but univocally equal.

Together with analogy and univocity, dialectic was used by Eckhart as a linguistic tool, typical of Neoplatonic tradition for predicating opposed determinations in order to present a higher truth. Anything that can be affirmed of God cannot be affirmed of creatures and vice versa because God is everything and creation is nothing. This is an extreme use of language but the total polarity was used by Eckhart to emphasise that God, as the source of creation, is both one with creation and yet beyond creation. In his *Commentary on Wisdom* he states that oneness is the same as indistinction and these are a signpost towards God and his perfection:

We must understand that the term "one" is the same as indistinct... Therefore, saying that God is one is to say that God is indistinct from all things, which is the property of the highest and first existence and its overflowing goodness ... God is one which is indistinct. This signifies the highest divine perfection, by which nothing exists without him or distinct from him.⁴²⁸

Here there is nothing outside of God nor distinct from God, and everything that exists, does so through God and remains in God. No other one nor thing could hold this property, and Eckhart substantiates this important dialectic, by quoting Thomas proposing that God is something indistinct which is distinguished by his indistinction.⁴²⁹ Being indistinct from creation makes God distinct.

⁴²⁸ Eckhart, *In Sap.* n. 144-5 (LW II 482,4... 482,10-483,1...483,3-4): '*Est igitur sciendum quod li unum idem est quod indistinctum... Dicens ergo deum esse unum vult dicere deum esse indistinctum ab omnibus, quod est proprietas summi esse et primi et eius bonitas exuberans... deum esse unum, quod est indistinctum, significat divinam summam perfectionem, qua sine ipso et ab ipso distinctum nihil est aut esse potest.*' Trans. here and following B. McGinn and F. Tobin (1987).

⁴²⁹ See Eckhart, *In Sap.* n. 144-5 (LW II 482,4-483,13); Thom. Aqu., *S. Th.* Ia q. 7, a. 1. Ad. 3.

The connection between being one, holding power and exercising power is made as Eckhart expands on the *auctoritas*, ‘and since it [wisdom] is one, it can do all things’⁴³⁰ and personalising God as wisdom:

For it would not be able to do anything were it not one, much less do all things. It should be recognised that insofar as a thing is more simple and more unified, it is more powerful and more strong, able to do more things. The reason is that every composite thing draws its power and strength from the other things composing it ... the more a thing is one, the more powerful it is as said. Therefore what is simply one, and it alone, can do all things.⁴³¹

Power is the source of, and seems to be directly proportional to, oneness. Total power comes from total oneness. Things draw their power from other things, but not something that is one because it does not lack power. Rather than compare the extent of power with oneness though, the conclusion is clear that God, as one, can do all things, and likewise the contrast is made that anything that is not simply one, is therefore not able to do all things. This background of recognising Eckhart’s notion of the relation between God and creation and the proposal that omnipotence is through oneness, illuminates the three statements of n. 5.

Firstly, from his *Exodus Commentary*, Eckhart develops this idea of supreme power by wrapping together notions of oneness and perfection:

In God every perfection is one ... and this is above all.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Wis. 7:27, ‘*et cum sit una omnia potest*’. See Eckhart, *In Sap.* n. 144-57 (LW II 481-494).

⁴³¹ Eckhart, *In Sap.* n. 156-7 (LW II 492, 2-5, 493,1-2): ‘*Nec enim posset, nisi esset una, multo minus posset omnia. Sciendum ergo quod quanto quid est simplicius et unitius, tanto est potentius et virtuosius, plura potens. Ratio est: omne enim compositum posse suum et virtutem trahit ab aliis ipsum componentibus ... quanto quid unitius, tanto potentius, ut dictum est. Ergo quod est simpliciter unum - et ipsum solum - potest omnia.*’ See also: Aristotle, *Topics*, 2.11 and 5.8 (115b, 137b); *Book of Causes*, Proposition 17 (16).

⁴³² Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 57 (LW II 62,14-63,1... 63,5): ‘*Sic in deo omnis perfectio una est... quid unum super omnes.*’

The relation between God and his attributes is seen in oneness, therefore perfection is seen in God who in his essence is one. As with the passage above from *Wisdom* there is no possibility of being higher or greater or before God and as such this is an abstract reflection of the Hebrew notion of *Sabaoth*. To be ‘above all’ means there is an ‘all’ and correspondingly this ‘all’ must be less than perfect. In his *Commentary on John*, Eckhart describes how creatures move through life in an imperfect way, but perfection is proper to God and every perfection comes from him.⁴³³ In his *Commentary on Exodus*, he uses texts from *Deuteronomy* and *James* to show how God is perfect and all his ways are perfect, but nature’s work begins from what is imperfect.⁴³⁴ The Meister refers to Dionysius when describing how the difference between perfection and imperfection can be perceived:

Our intellect grasps the perfections which belong to existence from creatures where perfections of this kind are imperfect, divided and scattered.⁴³⁵

Perfection belongs to existence in contrast with the things that merely exist who possess the same things, but in an imperfect way because they are divided or scattered. Therefore God’s power can be seen by us as the perfection of the imperfections we know, and yet these also provide an inner sense of the nature of perfection. God’s power is seen in active oneness and the perfection of oneness is seen in the action of God being one, whereas in everything created, there is multiplicity. Distinction between God and his creation is seen in the imperfection of multiplicity whereas oneness portrays perfection. As Christopher

⁴³³ See Eckhart, *In Joh.* n. 61-2, 86 (LW III 51,1-14, 74,6–75,2).

⁴³⁴ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 137 (LW II 125,9-13): ‘*Propter quod actio dei perfectissima est et incipit a perfecto, Deut. 32: “dei perfecta sunt opera”. Propter quod etiam dicitur descendere, Iac. 1: “omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum desursum descendens est”. Operatio autem naturae sive generatio e converso incipit ab imperfecto, et quo fini est vicinior, tanto perfectior.’ Deut. 32:4, ‘Dei perfecta sunt opera...’, Jas. 1:17, ‘omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum desursum...’ See also Eckhart, *Quaest. Par.* IV, n. 4 (LW V 73,4-8).*

⁴³⁵ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 78 (LW II 81,5-7): ‘*Intellectus enim noster perfectiones, quae ad esse pertinent, apprehendit ex creaturis, ubi huiusmodi perfectiones imperfectae sunt et divisae sparsim.*’

Wojtulewicz points out in a recent study, Eckhart proposes the powers in man are not imperfect because they are limited, but because they are not one.⁴³⁶

The point that God, because he is one, not only is perfect but also that he contains all perfection, is developed by Eckhart as he incorporates a number of scriptures, including this text from *Galatians*, supplemented here as the biblical rationale:

All perfections ... since they are in God as the First Cause of all things, are in him as necessarily and simply one and one thing, because “God is one” (*Gal. 3:20*).⁴³⁷

Perfection, or more specifically here, all perfections, are perfections in God who is the principle, or origin, or first cause of everything. In this sense, because everything has come from God, and God is one, then in everything from God, there is oneness. Yet, the perfection of everything is its perfection in God, though it is still the perfection of everything because the perfection is simultaneously in God, and God being the First Cause of all things, also in those things. The idea that a cause contains more perfectly the perfections of its effects, is picked up by Thomas in a passage which uses the context attributions being used as names to present how the perfection of God is seen in imperfect creation:

For these names [such as goodness] express God, so far as our intellects know Him. Now since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows Him as far as creatures represent Him ... God pre-contains in Himself all the perfections of creatures, being Himself simply and universally perfect. Hence every creature represents Him, and is like Him so far as it possesses some perfection; yet it represents Him not as something of the same species or genus, but as the excelling principle of whose form the effects fall short, although they derive some kind of likeness thereto, even as the forms of inferior bodies represent the power of the sun ... Therefore the aforesaid names signify the divine substance, but in an imperfect manner, even as creatures represent it imperfectly. So ...

⁴³⁶ C. Wojtulewicz, 'Kenosis and God's Power in Meister Eckhart's Parisian Question VI' (2016), 267-85.

⁴³⁷ *Gal. 3:20*: ‘*mediator autem unius non est Deus autem unus est*’; Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 57 (LW II 62,9... 62,9-11): ‘*Perfectiones autem omnes... utpote in causa prima omnium, et in ipso necessario sunt unum simpliciter et res una, quia “deus unus”*’.

"Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God," and in a more excellent and higher way.⁴³⁸

From this, the extent to which we know God is related to the way he has revealed himself through us. Thomas uses '*praehabet*' to show that the perfections we see in imperfect creation are from God who possesses all perfections. The idea, that effects have a cause and therefore require power to exist, is rooted in both Hebrew scriptures and Greek philosophy and here, perfections of creation reveal both God's power and his nature. Attributes in man are not the same as they are in God but, there is a likeness because the form of man comes from God as principle, and so an image of God is seen, although an inferior one.⁴³⁹ Creation is therefore a pointer towards the divine substance, but a flawed one and so any attribute found in man is an imperfect representation of the perfect God. Thomas is using analogy to show that perfections attributed to God are different in man and can only be applied through this relation between God and man. John O'Callaghan considers how Thomas reaffirmed Augustine's theological insight that man is in the highest *imago Dei* but 'does not posit a fissure at the heart of human life between our acts as embodied persons and our acts as images of God.'⁴⁴⁰ Our actions do not truly reflect God.

⁴³⁸ Thom. Aqu., *S.Th.* I q. 13, a. 2, resp., (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888), 142: '*Significant enim sic nomina Deum, secundum quod intellectus noster cognoscit ipsum. Intellectus autem noster, cum cognoscat Deum ex creaturis, sic cognoscit ipsum, secundum quod creaturae ipsum repraesentant ... Deus in se praehabet omnes perfectiones creaturarum, quasi simpliciter et universaliter perfectus. Unde quaelibet creatura intantum eum repraesentat, et est ei similis, inquantum perfectionem aliquam habet, non tamen ita quod repraesentet eum sicut aliquid eiusdem speciei vel generis, sed sicut excellens principium, a cuius forma effectus deficiunt, cuius tamen aliqualem similitudinem effectus consequuntur; sicut formae corporum inferiorum repraesentant virtutem solarem ... Sic igitur praedicta nomina divinam substantiam significant, imperfecte tamen, sicut et creaturae imperfecte eam repraesentant. Cum igitur... id quod bonitatem dicimus in creaturis, praexistit in Deo, et hoc quidem secundum modum altiore*' Text and trans. in Thomas Gilby, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Blackfriars edition), vol. 5 (London, 1967).

⁴³⁹ See 2Cor. 3:18.

⁴⁴⁰ J. O'Callaghan, 'Imago Dei' (2007), 144, see 100-44.

Eckhart also speaks notionally of the superior containing all imperfections when considering the name of Jesus:

this name is above every name ... because ... the superior is not deprived of the inferior's perfections, but pre-contains them all in a more excellent way.⁴⁴¹

In using this passage from *Philippians* presenting the kenotic and atoning works of Jesus, the Meister explains why this is the name above all names not just because of the key incidents of incarnation and crucifixion within the temporal sphere, but outside of this in terms of perfection. Implied by the use of '*prae-habet*', as above with Thomas, the sense of time is included to reflect a moment when everything was within God. Eckhart's use of the present tense, however, is also significant, because this pre-containing, rather than just referring backwards, is then to be understood as a continuing action. Whereas we comprehend God's actions such as creation and incarnation as moments in history, 'Christ is not a stage in the history of salvation but the saving inner structure of history. The inner structure is at the same time dynamic and perpetually present: *creatio* and *incarnatio continua*. Incarnation is the epitome of historicity.'⁴⁴² In this action there is no distinction, but functional unity between God and his creation.

It is this action, the *maxime actus* referred to in n. 3, that is the continuing process of generation which comes from perfection and also leads to perfection. In n. 5, Eckhart proposes that creatures possess total perfection once all imperfection is removed, and so having moved his audience to consider the imperfections of man, he now asks the listeners and readers to think of God removing these imperfections and replacing them with his own perfections.⁴⁴³ It is in this action that God's power can be comprehended.

As described above in the notes on n. 3, the perfect intrinsic action of the Godhead, because it is total action, cannot remain just intrinsic (*bullitio*), and therefore also breaks

⁴⁴¹ *Phil.* 2:9: '*propter quod et Deus illum exaltavit et donavit illi nomen super omne nomen*'; Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 35 (LW II 41, 13-5): "'donavit illi nomen quod est super omne nomen". *Superius enim non est privatum perfectionibus inferiorum, sed omnes prae-habet excellentius.*' See G.D. Fee, 'Paul's Letter to the Philippians' (1995), 39-46, 191-229.

⁴⁴² D. Mieth, 'Dynamics of Meister Eckhart – Past and Present' (2016), 90-1.

⁴⁴³ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics* IX c. 2 (103ra 30), *Avicenna Latinus, Liber de Philosophia Prima Sive Scientia*, Partes V-X (ed.) Simone Van Riet (1980), 456.

out, extrinsically into creation (*ebullitio*).⁴⁴⁴ Reiner Schürman presents how created beings receive being itself, are nothing in themselves and their dependence is understandable only in terms of the *ebullitio* of perfections out of their source.⁴⁴⁵ In creation there is imperfection, and in this regard distinction from God, but with the trace left of the perfection that is held through the metaphysical process of exit and return. From the divine perspective, because all action is perfect, creation retains this sense of oneness in God and therefore perfection. This continuous boiling over activity, from the Godhead, is described by Eckhart as the process of ‘going out’ (*exitus*) from God, and the ‘return’ (*reditus*) to God.

Every creature below man goes forth into existence according to the idea of similarity, and therefore seeks God again. It is enough for it to be similar to God. But man, because he has been made to the image of the one whole substance of God and has been brought forth into existence according to the idea of the One Whole, is not satisfied by a return to what is similar, but returns to the One from which he came forth. Thus alone is he satisfied.⁴⁴⁶

The significance of oneness and the ‘One’ is very apparent and in his descending into each and every action, God in essence is one and God not only remains one but unites what is divided.⁴⁴⁷ The action of God is seen here as if from a human perspective. Everything that exists does so because of the idea of the one, in departure from the one, and with the desire to return to the one. This second phase of the operation is mirrored biblically as the deep longing for eternity God has placed in the heart of man that can only

⁴⁴⁴ See Eckhart, *Sermo XXV* n. 258 (LW IV 236).

⁴⁴⁵ R. Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (1978), 179-80.

⁴⁴⁶ Eckhart, *In Joh.* n. 549 (LW III 479,6-480,1): ‘*Sed omnis creatura citra hominem exit producta in esse sub ratione similitudinis et propter hoc repetit deum et sufficit ipsi esse similem deo. Homini autem, cum sit factus ad imaginem totius unius substantiae dei et sit in esse productus sub ratione unius totius, non sufficit recursus ad simile, sed recurrit ad unum unde exivit, et sic solum sibi sufficit.*’

⁴⁴⁷ Eckhart, *In Sermo XXIV* n. 299 (LW IV 266,7-9): ‘*Undecimo, quia deus eo dives profusivus est, quia 'unus'. Primus enim et supremus est ratione qua unus. Propter quod unum descendit in omnia et singula, manens semper unum et divisa uniens.*’ Trans. B. McGinn and F. Tobin (1987).

be satisfied by being fully contained again within the oneness of God.⁴⁴⁸ Human and divine perspectives are obviously different, and while we consider the things we see in nature as perfections, they are in fact, imperfections. Also, from a human perspective there is the transformation from perfection to imperfection and then return to perfection but Eckhart is proposing all transformations are contained within a single continuous action from God. This means God is continually actualising, according to Dietmar Mieth, ‘as immanent by transforming human nature into a process of receiving God, as a permanent relation between God’s ground and the ground of the human soul ... God is not substance but a process: the continuous process of God giving “Godself”’.⁴⁴⁹

In his *Commentary on Exodus* the Meister again uses the concept of a name to present the singularity of God’s action. The name of God reflects his essence and also his action and so, using a text from *Zechariah*, he states:

In that day there will be one Lord, and his name will be One.⁴⁵⁰

This eschatological passage declares that God’s name is ‘One’, and in his future reign this oneness will be seen and known. Being one is the fundamental revelation of God to his people and the same terms used above to present God as one repeat those used in the ‘Great Shema’, ‘Hear O Israel! The Lord God (YHWH), our God, (YHWH) is one.’⁴⁵¹ Therefore, linking these notions together, God whose name is ‘one’ is revealed by this oneness because this name is also his essence, and because his essence is one, his action is one, and this single action is particular to God who is one.

Eckhart refers to Maimonides,⁴⁵² as he does frequently in this treatise on divine names, and using fire again as an illustration, states how fire melts, bleaches, blackens and burns

⁴⁴⁸ See *Eccl.* 3:11: ‘*cuncta fecit bona in tempore suo et mundum tradidit disputationi eorum ut non inveniatur homo opus quod operatus est Deus ab initio usque ad finem.*’ See T. Longman, ‘*The Book of Ecclesiastes*’ (1998), 118-21.

⁴⁴⁹ D. Mieth, ‘Dynamics of Meister Eckhart – Past and Present’ (2016), 77, 79.

⁴⁵⁰ *Zech.* 14:9: ‘*et erit Dominus rex super omnem terram in die illa erit Dominus unus et erit nomen eius unum*’; *In Ex.* n. 57 (LW II 63, 7-8): ‘*in illa die erit dominus unus et nomen eius unum*’. See C. L. Meyers, E.M. Meyers, ‘Zechariah 9-14’ (1993), 439-40.

⁴⁵¹ *Deut.* 6:4: ‘*audi Israhel Dominus Deus noster Dominus unus est*’.

⁴⁵² For the influence of Maimonides on Eckhart see J.Koch, ‘Meister Eckhart und die jüdische Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters’ (1928), 134-48. And Eckhart’s adoption

and so might seem to possess different powers, but in practice all these are the one action of fire that by its nature, heats.⁴⁵³ As humans exercise wisdom, power or the will, they are seen as different properties, but in the creator these are exercised through his substance, and consequently are one and reflect their creator. Power is one because there is effectively only one source of power, and so all things are done in one particular, *singulariter*, way.

These first and second statements that omnipotence is seen in the perfection of one power acting in a singular way, also link to the third statement of the text by using Eckhart's comments on *Exodus*. Contrasting what man can and God can do, Eckhart describes how Maimonides, following on from above example of fire, gives the second example of man,

who by a single rational power "in which there is no multiplicity" does many different things. Through it he builds, cuts, covers, rules fellow citizens, knows arithmetic, and by the one rational power brings many things of this sort into existence. "If this be so, how will we remove from the power of the high and lofty Creator, the different things that proceed from one simple substance in which there is no multiplicity nor anything added on?"⁴⁵⁴

Eckhart is continuing to develop his point about God being one in substance and powerful in his substance with the contrast, made again, between the power and oneness of the creator, and also, leading into the third statement of n. 5, this creation proceeds from God. The creator is not only powerful in his substance but all things flow in procession from this one simple substance which matches the development in the text of *Question six* through nn. 3-5. This notion is established by recalling further from the treatise on divine

of Maimonides in comparison with how he uses Thomas see B. McGinn, *Teacher and Preacher* (1986), 15-26.

⁴⁵³ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 42 (LW II 46,10-47,11).

⁴⁵⁴ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 43 (LW II 47,12-48,3): '*Secundum exemplum ibidem ponit in homine qui una potentia rationali, "in qua non est multitudo", operatur diversa et plurima. Per ipsam aedificat, scindit, textit, regit cives, scit arithmetica, et multa huiusmodi una potentia rationali "extrahit ad esse. Quod si ita est, quomodo removebimus a potentia creatoris sublimis et excelsi quod ista diversa, quae operatur, proveniant ab una substantia simplici, in qua nulla est multitudo nec aliquid additum super ipsam?"*'

names that not only is God one, and his name is ‘One’ but also that God is omnipotent and his name is ‘Omnipotent’ because

we name things from knowing them and according to the manner in which we know them.⁴⁵⁵

Actions proceed from essence, therefore, because names come from action, they reveal essence, and it is right to name God as ‘All-Powerful’.⁴⁵⁶ To take this a step further, as the one who is all-containing, God is not un-nameable but *omni-nominable*.⁴⁵⁷ For Eckhart, instead of being unable to know God, as Maimonides maintained generally, God is revealed through all the attributes we comprehend, even if in an imperfect sense. This apophatic to cataphatic shift by Eckhart relates back to the notion inferred by the Greek term in the *LXX* for Almighty God, *pantokrator*,⁴⁵⁸ as the all-powerful, all-conquering, all-containing, all-sustaining,⁴⁵⁹ one, and this forges the links between perfection, the singularity of power, and God’s essence being the principle of all emanations. Power emanates from one divine essence in one singular, or particular divine action.⁴⁶⁰ This is one action because it is from God’s essence, in contrast with being an action of God’s will. God is not deliberating about which action to choose such that there may be alternatives to select from, because this is pure action, and so all actuality is the one exercise of his potentiality. God’s oneness of essence is seen in the oneness of his action and this is his nature and therefore this action aligns with what we perceive as his will. Power in God can be understood as the emanation, or pouring out of perfection, and this

⁴⁵⁵ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 57 (LW II 62,7-8): ‘*et quia secundum quod res cognoscimus, secundum hoc et ex illis ipsas nominamus.*’

⁴⁵⁶ See A. Beccarisi, ‘Eckhart’s Latin Works’ (2013), 97.

⁴⁵⁷ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 35 (LW II 41,15-42,1): “‘*Nomen*’ ergo, “*quod est super omne nomen*”, *non est innominabile, sed omninominabile.*’ See R. Williams, *The Edge of Words* (2014), 175.

⁴⁵⁸ See above Part I, ‘The Permeation of Hellenism’.

⁴⁵⁹ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 29 (LW II 34,14-35,1), (Gregory the Great, *Morals on Job*, 16. 37. 45).

⁴⁶⁰ See A. Beccarisi, ‘Eckhart’s Latin Works’ (2013), 109; Eckhart, *In Gen.* II n. 3 (LW I 453,9–454,5), n. 215 (LW I, 691,2-10, or 439,11-9 in 2015 edition), *In Sap.* n. 260 (LW II, 592,7-9), *In Ioh.* n. 469 (LW III, 12,13).

power is both absolute in essence and related to action as stated by Eckhart during his defence against charges of heresy in 1326 AD:

Even the absolute acts of the Godhead proceed from God according to the property of his attributes.⁴⁶¹

God operates out of his essence in all his actions and even when considering directed actions, these proceed from God. Power may be considered distinct in its own essence but, in the sense that it is the emanating action from God, it is indistinct from the actions it causes. The passage from the *Commentary on Wisdom* referred to above makes the connection between potency, the one acting and action caused by this one acting. Three reasons are given to show how nothing is so one and indistinct as God and every created being:

1. Nothing is as indistinct as being and existence, potency and its act, form and matter. This is how God and every creature are related.
2. Nothing is so much one and indistinct as a thing that is composed and that from which, through which and in which it is composed and subsists.
3. Nothing is as distinct from anything as from that from which it is indistinguished by its own distinction.⁴⁶²

Three points are used to describe how nothing numbered or created is indistinct from God because all things are from God as first principle. In the first point, three pairs, termed '*termini generales*' by Eckhart, listed as being and existence, potency and act and form

⁴⁶¹ See B. McGinn, *Essentials* (1981), 72.

⁴⁶² See Eckhart, *In Sap.* n. 155 (LW II 490,11-491,10): '*Rursus vero et hoc notandum quod nihil tam unum et indistinctum quam deus et omne creatum. Ratio est triplex, ut prius in opposito. Primo, quia nihil tam indistinctum quam ens et esse, potentia et actus eiusdem, forma et materia. Sic autem se habet deus et omne creatum. Secundo sic: nihil tam unum et indistinctum quam constitutum et illud ex quo, per quod et in quo constituitur et subsistit. Sed, sicut dictum est, numerus sive multitudo, numeratum et numerabile ut sic ex unitatibus constituitur et subsistit. Igitur nihil tam indistinctum quam deus unus aut unitas et creatum numeratum. Tertio sic: nihil tam indistinctum ab aliquo quam ab illo, a quo distinctione ipsa indistinguitur. Sed omne numerosum sive creatum sua distinctione indistinguitur a deo, ut dictum est supra. Ergo nihil tam indistinctum et per consequens unum. Indistinctum enim et unum idem. Quare deus et creatum quodlibet indistincta.*'

and matter, are presented as possessing an incomparable indistinction, with the middle pair being significant to the notion of God's omnipotence. Having proposed in the earlier paragraph that all potentiality and actuality are in God, Eckhart has demonstrated how, because these are of God's essence, and this essence is one, then the potentiality to act and actuality are indistinct. God's absolute power flows in the perfection of oneness, because his essence emanates into the actions he directs.

Oneness is seen in distinction and indistinction, and also perfection and imperfection and all this is through one singular action as the process of emanation is an emphatic expression of power. Referring to Proclus in his *General Prologue* Eckhart states:

It is the nature of the first and superior, being "rich in itself", to influence and effect the inferior with its properties, among which are unity and indivision. What is divided in the inferior is always one and undivided in the superior. It clearly follows that the superior is in no way divided in the inferior; but, while remaining undivided, it gathers together and unites what is divided in the inferior.⁴⁶³

It is in this action of influencing and effecting that God in his very nature, returns creation to himself, and the divisions it possesses, into perfect unity. The inferior has come from the superior which actively emanates in such a way as to return the inferior to itself. This is another way of describing the absolute power of God, or the essence of God, and indeed, the *exitus* and *reditus* of God as the *ebullitio* of divine action. Eckhart also refers to the *Book of Causes* in his *Commentary on Exodus* to describe this emanating action:

God is insofar as he is the First Cause flowing into [all things] with himself in the first instance.⁴⁶⁴

The 'First Cause', although not a thing, is indistinct from all things in actualising them. There is no distinction in how power operates. The contrast between Eckhart and the

⁴⁶³ Eckhart, *Prolog. gen. in Opus tripartitum*, n. 10 (LW I/2 21-5): '*De ratione enim primi et superioris, cum sit "dives per se", est influere et afficere inferiora suis proprietatibus, inter quas est unitas et indivisio. Semper enim divisum inferius unum est et indivisum in superiori. Ex quo patet quod superius nullo modo dividitur in inferioribus, sed manens indivisum colligit et unit divisa in inferioribus.*' See Proclus? (Anonymous), *Liber de Causis*, proposition 20.

⁴⁶⁴ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 105 (LW II 106,9-10): '*Hoc autem est id, quod deus ipse, utpote causa prima, influit se ipso primo.*' See *Liber De Causis* proposition 1 (163,3).

earlier treatments of the power debate is clear because later 13th century incorporation of philosophical ideas saw the focal point move to consider power in its essence while canonical issues presented the extra possibilities for man (or at least the pope). Either way the switch of emphasis was such that, in early 14th century Paris, the debate now focussed more on the question of how to understand *de potentia absoluta* and for the Meister this was not just an abstract concept. Eckhart's treatment compares with that of Thomas by showing similar thinking in many aspects of the debate, although there is also a subtle but important difference reflecting the general thinking of each and this gap widens as the text continues.

The three strands of perfection, singularity of action and emanating essence are drawn together in oneness and one indistinguishable expression of deity and, superficially, this does not seem to stray too far from Thomas in his *Q.d. De potentia*, who makes the apparent connection between power and essence by setting up this argument:

Essence is more dignified than power, because power is an addition to essence.⁴⁶⁵

However, in reply to this, Thomas suggests our minds, in wrestling to fathom something incomprehensible, might perceive a distinction between God's power and his essence but, in practice, active power in God is identical with his essence saying,

All operation proceeds from power. Now operation is supremely attributable to God. Therefore power is most fitting to God ... We attribute power to God by reason of that which is permanent and is the principle of power, and not by reason of that which is made complete by operation.⁴⁶⁶

God's power is to be seen in principle rather than just as actualising power (the apparent inconsistency in Thomas' notion of all potentiality being actualised is considered later, in comments on n. 10). Thomas associates power here with God in principle, rather than the action which proceeds from power. As seen earlier in his *Summa*, Thomas uses the phrase

⁴⁶⁵ Thom. Aqu., '*Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 1, 6, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 8a: '*Dignius autem est essentia quam potentia: quia potentia essentiae advenit.*

⁴⁶⁶ Thom. Aqu., '*Q.d. De potentia*, q1, a.1, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 8b-9a: '*omnis operatio ab aliqua potentia procedit. Sed Deo maxime convenit operari. Ergo Deo maxime potentia convenit... Potentiam vero attribuimus ratione eius quod permanet et quod est principium eius, non ratione eius quod per operationem completur.*'

'maxime potentia activa' in comparison with Eckhart's *'maxime actus'* and so neither seem to make a distinction between God and active power and both emphasise the ultimate and absolute nature of this.

Eckhart, like Aquinas, refers to God's active power being seen in the perfection of the imperfections we know, but it is in this statement of Eckhart in n. 5 that the difference is revealed, as the Meister presents how the oneness of perfection emanates in one singular action into creation. This is the picture of a continuous flow of actualising power from God into everything. God does not act distinctly from himself, but in the act of generation which is the continuously flowing singular act of emanation. This continuity of action retains a unique sense of oneness, indistinction and perfection between God and his creation. For Thomas however, there is the flow of action from essence, and this being firstly from form, but these actions are being operated as actions in themselves meaning there is a separation between God and creation. Consequential of this difference is the notion of man's perfection because Eckhart describes perfection as being actualised in the emanating flow of power. Thomas proposes that God holds the perfection of all the imperfections we perceive in man, like Eckhart, but there is not the same intimation that God is actively and continuously removing the imperfections to complete the act of perfecting.⁴⁶⁷ Thomas speaks of the removing of imperfections to gain an expression of divine perfection but these are distinct from divine perfections. The above text infers a distinction between essence and the completion of operation whereas for Eckhart the perfection of oneness between God and man is in the continuous action of the operation. It is Eckhart who says man's creaturely imperfections are removed, and it is this action that is effectively the *maxime actus* of God. God is actively and continuously removing the imperfections of man and replacing them with his own perfections. This *'amota imperfectione'* is an expression of the *reditus*, the returning, emanating action of God's power bringing creation back to himself. Therefore, in this action man is being perfected, but this is not by becoming perfect man but actually God. This could never match the thinking of Thomas who said that man does not possess the perfections of God in any measure, and what man does possess, is just a reflection of God's perfections. This means that goodness in man is not like goodness in God but an imperfect version of it. In Thomas, God is working in man to make him perfect such that man's goodness becomes perfect, but this means he becomes perfect man and in no sense God.

⁴⁶⁷ See Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 1, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 9a.

In n. 5 Eckhart's use of *amota imperfectione*, and *singulariter* can be used in this way to unlock the door to this radical idea because this is consistent with his teaching elsewhere. For Eckhart, creation, considered isolated from God, is imperfect and a negation but the action of God is to perfect creatures through the negation of negation. 'Everything' is opposed to 'nothing', and God has power over everything because power over nothing would be its total negation. To have power over nothing is to have no power.⁴⁶⁸ Action from God is the flowing out of the divine source and also its return and so there is the sense of continuous perfecting of all that is flowing and the unchanging perfection of the indistinct Godhead. Creation remains indistinct with the origin, or principle of this action suggesting the notion of living continuously in this divine perfection. Eckhart spoke of this, and not just in an abstract manner, urging the negating of creatureliness as the act of detachment, *abgeschiedenheit* in which man loses all of himself to be full of God. As man detaches himself from every particular thing, then God unites himself with man and this is a natural operation for God. Eckhart separates the outer man with senses from the inner man which, by detachment from everything, unites totally with God who, as the one who negates this negation, in essence is the negation of negation. Instead of creatureliness which, by its nature, is dependent on other things and in particular the creator, man moves, or effectively returns, to the divinity and as such is independent. Creation does not possess that power in itself but in the act of detachment, becomes independent and not lacking in anything, including power. More than this thought of human response, it is an expression of the very essence and total action of God. As Eckhart explains how, 'what goes for God's knowledge is equally true about his kingdom and rule', and then by using *Micah* 4:5, 'we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and beyond', he proposes that God does not just possess knowledge but transfers this divine knowledge to 'us'.⁴⁶⁹ This is consistent with the perfecting process described earlier in n. 5. In his treatise '*On Detachment*' the illustration of a baker's oven describes both God's action as a single action and the significance of man's response:

⁴⁶⁸ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 30 (LW II 36,7-37,8).

⁴⁶⁹ *Mic.* 4:5, '*quia omnes populi ambulabunt unusquisque in nomine dei sui nos autem ambulabimus in nomine Domini Dei nostri in aeternum et ultra.*' Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 86 (LW II 89,4-6): '*Et sicut est de scientia dei, sic pari ratione est de regno ipsius et regimine, Mich. 4: "ambulabimus in nomine domini dei nostri in aeternum et ultra"*'. See M. Vinzent, *Detachment* (2011), 1-4.

If someone heats a baker's oven, and puts in one loaf of oats and another of barley and another of rye and another of wheat, there is only one temperature in the oven, but it does not have the same effect upon the different doughs, because one turns into fine bread, another is coarse and a third even coarser. And this is not the fault of the temperature but of the materials, which are not the same. In the same way, God does not work alike in every man's heart; he works as he finds willingness and receptivity.⁴⁷⁰

This is obviously similar to the example given of fire although the results of the heat on this occasion are seen in Eckhart's congregation. Speaking of fire emphasised the particular action of God, but the message here is almost that of the 'parable of the Sower', or 'soils' in which Jesus described how the different types of soil or ground represented the different ways people respond to the gospel, yet one way is best.⁴⁷¹ The good soil that was fruitful compares, to some extent, with the notion of detachment as a way of life. The context of this treatise is uncertain but it represents the consistency between his Latin and German works and also the sense of the Meister, as a member of the 'Order of Preachers', seeking his listeners, or at least readers if this is not a sermon, to apply his theoretical musings into practice. It is worth pausing to mull over the term Eckhart has used here in Middle High German to describe the notion that has been translated into English as detachment. *Abgeschiedenheit* is a compound of *ab* and *schieden* pointing to the

⁴⁷⁰ Eckhart, VAb, (*On Detachment*) (DW V 424,4-11): 'Des vinden wir ein glîchnisse in der natûre: sô man einen bakoven heizet und dar in leget einen teic von habern und einenvon gersten und einen von roggen und einen von weizen, nû enist niht dan éin hitze in dem ovne und enwürket doch niht glîch in den teigen, wan der ein wirt schœne brôt, der ander wirt rûcher, der dritte noch rûcher. Und daz enist niht der hitze schult, ez ist der materien schult, diu dâ unglîch ist. Ze glîcher wîse sô enwürket got niht glîch in allen herzen; er würket dar nâch, als er bereitschaft und enpfenclicheit vindet.' Trans. E. College and B. McGinn (1981).

For a recent discussion on Eckhart's understanding of *abgeschiedenheit*, especially alongside his concept of time see T. Kim, 'Ez wære allez éin lieht' an Artist's Advance' (2016), 26-37.

⁴⁷¹ See *Matt. 13: 1-23*, J. Nolland, 'The Gospel of Matthew, A Commentary on the Greek text' (2005), 520-42.

separating, or cutting off, from something and hence the English translation. This adds understanding to the dialectic issue of God being continually transcendent and immanent, and encapsulates the Aristotelian influence in Meister's through the works of Avicenna and Albert.⁴⁷² Eckhart uses *Abgeschiedenheit* to translate *abstractus* to describe literally the abstracting or separating from matter. In modern German, *das Abgeschiedene* refers to what has been separated and so the connection between *abgeschiedenheit* and the Latin *absoluta* should not be missed. The Latin *absolute* is a similar compound of *ab* and *solvere* literally meaning to solve by setting free or releasing. Knowing the exact thinking process of the Meister can only be speculation but connecting the two ideas of being separated and setting free portrayed by these terms is irresistible. Eckhart set out, or more correctly, was sent out from Tambach-Dietharz and the wonderful hills and forests of the Thüringen Wald, to head for the mediaeval bustle around the Dominican compound in Erfurt. In his Latin and theology lessons he will have learnt about the absolute nature of God and maybe even the absolute omnipotence of God. As a young German studying in his local town, his notions of what he is learning about as *absolute* might just have resonated with the sense of beauty, freedom and yet uncontainable wildness of his own territory. He probably spent time wandering between home and the tower at Altenfels, which could have been the look out-tower, used by workers on behalf of his father as toll-gatherer.⁴⁷³ Maybe a young Eckhart deliberated over a term that could transfer the Latin

⁴⁷² See D. Gottschall, 'Eckhart's German Works' (2013), 180-3; J.D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (1986), 11-2.

⁴⁷³ It is not known exactly where Eckhart lived but there is a record suggesting the family moved from Hocheim near Gotha to Tambach-Dietharz and his father held a position connected with toll-collecting. The place associated with Eckhart at Altenfels is remote and rocky and unlikely to be the family home. It is more likely that this location, where the ruins today are a mixture of natural rock and man-built walls, would lend itself to being a look-out tower. Maybe travellers paid their tolls to travel, and this was checked at the tower which holds a secure position which overlooks three navigable passages. The young Eckhart, could well have accompanied his father who was the director of operations, and explored what is now the Thüringer Wald nature park. For an account of Eckhart's background see W. Senner, 'Meister Eckhart's life, Training, Career and Trial' (2013); E. Albrecht, 'Zur Herkunft Meister Eckharts' (1978). Also for placing Eckhart's

absolute into the vernacular, and his experience of life, together with his education in Erfurt, moulded this concept into the *abgeschiedenheit* he described in his German sermons.

The orthodoxy of the thought that man could be perfect, indistinct from God and essentially part of the divine being would be questioned, especially with Thomas being regarded as the plumb-line. For Thomas, God acts from his power to bring about creation which is distinct, and also God acts to restore perfection but this is only creaturely. Absolute power is the power from God that brings man's perfection about but for Eckhart, it is the way in which God actively holds indistinction and secures it between himself as existence and everything that exists. Creation is within this absoluteness and the negating of creation is the action of absolute power, therefore God is detachment and indeed, the negation of negation, in both essence and action.

Abgeschiedenheit, *bullitio* and *ebullitio*, *exitus* and *reditus* are terms that particularly shape Eckhart's thinking, and although they are not referred to specifically in this text, they are essential in gaining the clear 'understanding' that is consequential to n. 3. The total power of God, is in God, and is the action of God, perfecting the imperfections of man, in a singular, emanating action.

n. 6 Second, it is to be enquired how this distinction between absolute and directed power should be understood. For when some properties are attributed to God [insofar as he is God], these pertain to absolute power. But when some properties are attributed with respect to his intellect and wisdom, then these pertain to directed power.

n. 7 Now thirdly, to this question we say what the Master in his *Sentences*, with the [authoritative] sayings of the saints, determined, and it seems that, according to him, [God's omnipotence] is to be considered as both [as absolute and as directed power].

n. 8 Some others say, however, that he is omnipotent because he can do everything he wills by himself and of himself.

Having stated how God's power should be understood, such that absolute power is the action that both exemplifies and brings indistinction, the Meister moves on to this second point of enquiry, as marked in the margin, by returning to the question of how the

life in context of the 'Order of Preachers' see W. Senner, 'Dominican Education' (2013), appendix, 711-23.

distinction between absolute and directed power should be understood. As far as Eckhart is concerned, the distinction does not exist from God's perspective and it is only formed from man's conception of the connection between God, his power, and his relation to man. When we consider God, certain terms used to comprehend God such as 'one' and 'perfection', as expanded in n. 5, present an idea in contrast with something else, in that God is not multiple or imperfect. Likewise, God is the 'First Cause' and 'Necessary Existence' and these terms imply that there are other causes or existences.⁴⁷⁴ The notions raised by these terms emphasise the difference between God and everything else from man's perspective, and for Eckhart this is the reason for the power distinction. The difference is according to how properties are attributed to God, and this is also reflected in the n. 3 proposal that actuality in God is seen as both active and passive. The notion of potentiality becomes a matter of perspective. Eckhart states here that when considering God in his essence irrespective of action, this relates to *potentia absoluta*, and alongside this, the extent to which we refer to God as the one who has brought everything into existence, then the focus is on the actions of God and this relates to *potentia ordinata*. By considering the statements of n. 3 and n. 5, potentiality is power in its essence not directed into action, but because God is total active power, he is total actuality. Man can only comprehend God in his total actuality, otherwise God is not God.

From n. 1, there is the proposal that God only does what is *decens* and acts out of such as intellect and wisdom and so anything attributed to God because of what he does comes under the idea of directed power. Intellect or reason, and wisdom are indistinct within the essence of God, therefore consistency within this argument suggests that other predicates than *ratio* and *sapientia*, because they are given by man, could also fill these slots which emphasise the distinction, rather than these particular characteristics. In a comparative passage in his *Sentences Commentary*, Thomas supplies an identical argument but proposes the distinction is based on wisdom and foreknowledge, *sapientia* and *praescientia*.⁴⁷⁵ Eckhart's *Commentary on Exodus* is again helpful in shedding light on

⁴⁷⁴ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 21 (LW II 27,8-11), with reference to Avicenna's *Metaphysics* 8.1.4; *In Ex.* n. 80 (LW II 83,11-84,2), with reference to the '*Book of Causes*', propositions 167,4.

⁴⁷⁵ See Thom. Aqu., *Scriptum Sent.* III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, resp. (ed.) Moos (Paris, 1956), 36, footnote 261.

how the difference is according to the way properties are attributed to God and the significance of a name is again a key to unlocking the proposition:

... no name is more proper to Existence itself than the name “Existence”. But God is Existence itself ... The name is most proper to a thing which encompasses everything that belongs to and is attributed to it. But Existence Itself has and possesses everything which is proper to God ... Further, existence belongs to and is attributed to God because he is said to be lasting and eternal, having no cause nor principle, but himself being the cause and principle of all things. All these statements more plainly and clearly appear to belong to God under the name of existence than under the name “God”.⁴⁷⁶

Attributing existence to God focusses on God in his essence and not his actions, and everything existing, does so through this existence. N. 6 presents God’s power as being attributed to God as God or, alternatively, attributed to God according to the actions that God actualises. The distinction here is expressed as the difference seen through attribution. From comments on *Exodus*,⁴⁷⁷ existence relates to the affirmation of God as ‘I am who I am’ presenting both God in his essence and as pure naked existence. Eckhart connects God’s ‘that it is’ (*anitas*), with his ‘what it is’ (*quidditas*), to signify his existence is the same as his essence and this essence is self-sufficient or, its own sufficiency.⁴⁷⁸ *Anitas*, as Eckhart cites, is from Avicenna (*Metaphysics* 8. 4). McGinn believes Eckhart

⁴⁷⁶ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.162-3 (LW II 142,8-10...142,11-3...143,12-144,3): ‘*Igitur nullum nomen est magis proprium ipsi esse quam li esse. Deus autem est ipsum esse ... illud nomen est propriissimum rei, cui competunt et attribuuntur omnia, quae illius rei sunt propria. Sed ipsi esse conveniunt et congruunt omnia, quae deo sunt propria ... Rursus quod deus dicitur permanens, sempiternus, nullam habens causam nec principium, sed ipse est principium et causa omnium, et pari modo de omnibus quae dicuntur de deo generaliter: conveniunt et attribuuntur ipsi esse. Evidentius etiam et planius apparent convenire ipsi deo sub hoc nomine esse quam sub hoc nomine deus.*’

⁴⁷⁷ *Exod.* 3:14, ‘*dixit Deus ad Mosen ego sum qui sum*’.

⁴⁷⁸ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 15 (LW II 21,2-6): ‘*Quod quotiens fit, purum esse et nudum esse significat in subiecto et de subiecto et ipsum esse subiectum, id est essentiam subiecti, idem scilicet essentiam et esse, quod soli deo convenit, cuius quidditas est sua anitas, ut ait Avicenna, nec habet quidditatem praeter solam anitatem, quam esse significat.*

uses this idea of essence and existence as a Neoplatonic perspective on the Thomistic metaphysics of identity. Jan Aertsen also notes the rarity of the term *quidditas* in the middle ages, describing Eckhart's use of the term as 'remarkable' and points to Thomas showing that in creatures, essence is intrinsic but existence comes from outside.⁴⁷⁹ It is not co-incidental that God is described as the all-sufficient one in this treatise which explains how the Hebrew name for God given as '*Shaddai*', as seen in chapter one, that has been translated into English as 'Almighty', actually points to the sufficiency of God.⁴⁸⁰ Eckhart explains that God

does not need any creature's essence or anything outside himself to establish him or perfect him, but his essence is self-sufficient to all things and in all things. Such sufficiency is proper to God alone ... Therefore, substance and power, existence, and operation are different in everything that is beneath God. Such divine sufficiency is signified when from God's Person we hear, "I am who am".⁴⁸¹

Outside of God, substance, power, existence and operation are multiple within things which are thereby dependent on something other than themselves, or in other words, anything which is creaturely, is different in itself by nature, and action, if only because it is not self-sufficient. However these things are not different in God, and therefore, as stated in n. 5, 'there is only one power' and one action. This is consistent with the idea, presented above, that perfection, or detachment, is a position of independence and sufficiency.

⁴⁷⁹ See J. Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought* (1988), 139; Thom. Aqu., *S.c.G.*, I, 22, (ed.) Leon (1918); *De veritate* 8, 8; B. McGinn, *Essentials* (1981), 32-8.

⁴⁸⁰ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 156–60 (LW II 138,10-142,2).

⁴⁸¹ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 20 (LW II, 26,6-8, 26,12-4): '*non eget essentia alicuius entis nec eget alio extra se ad firmitatem sive perfectionem sui, sed ipsa essentia sufficit sibimet ad omnia et in omnibus. Et hoc est proprium soli deo, talis scilicet sufficientia ... Propter hoc in omni citra deum differt substantia et potentia, esse et operari. Talis ergo sufficientia dei significatur, cum ex persona dei dicitur: "ego sum qui sum"*'. See *In Ex.* n. 14–21 (LW II 20,1-28,10); Eckhart includes a quote from Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 1:63.

Eckhart continues to show how considering difference is a matter of relation and the different perspectives held by God and creation. Firstly, substance is mentioned as being different outside of God and this distinction is also presented later in his *Commentary on Exodus* in a formula connecting substance and relation. Everything that exists does so because of the existence or substance that has brought it into existence:

Everything of this sort is a being or thing in external fashion by an analogical relationship to the one thing which is a being and a thing, that is, substance.⁴⁸²

God's absoluteness is his in substance whereas everything else exists in relation to him. Everything external to being has an analogical relation to the substance of being but this is different from the univocal relation of substance to the beings that have emanated from it. The idea of relation with God is treated more thoroughly in *Question eight*, so here it is suffice to show that this difference in relation between being and beings connects with the power distinction as being a matter of perspective.

Secondly with regards to power, as shown in n. 5, whereas God actualises through one power, we perceive different actions although they are only one action, as demonstrated by the fire illustration given earlier.⁴⁸³ Everything that 'is', exists because it has been brought about by the power of God and this points to distinction, yet the idea of power presented in n. 5 proposes a oneness between God and his creation and an indistinction. As seen earlier, Eckhart uses this dialectic of distinction and indistinction to dissolve the difference between absolute and directed power. When power is considered, the distinction can be made between the power directed in things, and absolute power which is God himself who is beyond these things. For Eckhart, God is one, singular absolute action and so there is no difference other than from man's perspective because man comprehends only directed power as an expression of God's absolute power, or his total potentiality in actualisation. This is the same for the other two aspects mentioned above, namely existence and operation, in that they are different from a human perspective because we perceive actions and beings, but God simply is action and being. We can only speculate that from God's perspective, there is no distinction.

⁴⁸² Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 54 (LW II, 59,7-9): '*Sunt ergo omnia huiusmodi entia sive res extra analogice ad unum, quod est ens et res, scilicet substantia.*'

⁴⁸³ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 42 (LW II 46,10-47,11), also footnote 453.

Having shown that God's power is not distinct from his essence, the Meister calls to attention earlier contributions from the power debate and referring to Lombard and Augustine would keep his audience alert as these two are not only prominent figures in the scholastic and philosophical approach to theology, but they also mark the innovation of Eckhart's proposal in *Question six*.

This response to n. 6 highlights the earlier roots to the debate, firstly calling to mind Peter Lombard, but not on his own, as the authoritative sayings of the saints are also included in this point. As presented in chapter one, Lombard's *Sentences* were the most important text book in the new universities and so Eckhart's audience would already be well versed in the distinctions in *Book I* considering the power of God. Maybe Eckhart's '*et videtur*' was a way of being careful not to disrespect Lombard, and indeed any other scholars or 'saints' while co-incidentally presenting the frailty in their earlier arguments. Including the 'saints' adds weight behind Lombard, and grammatical construction suggests these authoritative teachings of the past belong to the same thinking as Lombard, although literally it is only the 'Master of the *Sentences*' who is specified to be maintaining that God's power should be seen as both *absoluta* and *ordinata*. Lombard wanted to release the shackle of Abelard's restriction by proposing that God could do more things than he chooses to do, although he never actually does them. The terms designating *potentia*, either as *absoluta* or *ordinata* were not yet conventional to the debate and it was developments from such as William of Auxerre, Godfrey of Poitiers, Hugh of St. Cher and Alexander of Hales who established the formula and significantly, the difference between the two terms as presented by Eckhart. Therefore, because there is a possible difference to be seen, then there must be two aspects to God's power, enabling Eckhart to point to this argument that God's power should be seen as 'both of them'. The term both simply confirms that there are two ways that God's power can be perceived, and these are set out in the introductory paragraphs one and two. Lombard does not refer to *absoluta* and *ordinata* as two ways to consider God's omnipotence but in *distinction 42* he describes two aspects that should be considered:

Namely that he does all that he wills, and that he suffers nothing at all.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁴ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 42. C. 3 (186) (1971), 294-8: '*Quod omnipotentia Dei secundum duo consideratur. Hic igitur dili genter considerantibus omnipotentia eius secundum duo apparet, scilicet quod omnia facit quae vult, et nihil omnino patitur. Secundum utrumque*

The first aspect is the same as the following statement of n. 8, that God does everything he wills. The link is made by Lombard, that this is why God is called omnipotent and reference is made to Augustine, and specifically to *Enchiridion*, as does Thomas and also Eckhart in n. 13. The second aspect connects with the idea presented in n. 3 when God, is presented as *maxime actus* and therefore cannot suffer at the hands of anything. These two aspects then, to some extent, relate to the *ordinata* and *absoluta* because the first one limits God's power according to what he does, and the second seeks to emphasise the absoluteness of God's power.

Earlier in this treatment, Eckhart has presented this view with his initial and counter argument proposing that directed power describes the things God does, and then suggesting there are more things that God could do. Lombard, worked from what was seen as the view of Augustine that God only does what he wills to do, and used the *distinctions* in his *Sentences* to present how God's capacity is greater than his volition, as others such as Anselm, and even Abelard in theory, had been keen to show.⁴⁸⁵

In n. 8, when Eckhart says, 'some others say' that God is omnipotent because he can do everything he wills, this is likely to be a reference to Augustine and this is confirmed by the closing statements in this treatment, as well as the references from Lombard, above. The '*quidam tamen*' suggests there maybe differences between Lombard and the authoritative others and Augustine's notion of God's power, although Lombard refers several times to Augustine during his distinctions on power and mostly uses these texts as the orthodox framework on which to build. Marginal markings also suggest a separation between n. 7 and n. 8 but this is maybe just to indicate Augustine's emphasis of the will in the actions of God, rather than there being two ways of understanding God's power. Aquinas, in his *Q.d. De potentia*, also points to Augustine saying that God can do everything he wills by himself and of himself and this small phrase also connects with Lombard describing how God is powerful both in himself and through himself.⁴⁸⁶ In these

Deus omnipotens verissime praedicatur, quia nec aliquid est quod ei ad patiendum corruptionem inferre valeat, nec aliquid ad faciendum impedimentum afferre.'

⁴⁸⁵ See Lombard, I *Sent.*, d. 43, c. 1, (187) (1971).

⁴⁸⁶ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia* q. 1 a. 7, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: '*quia potest quidquid vult; et hoc habet a se et per se*'. Thomas could well be referring to the earlier 13th century work from the University of Paris by William of Auxerre whose *Summa Aurea* considers Lombard's *Sentences*; Lombard, I *Sent.*, d. 42, c. 3, 4 (186) (1971): '*Et*

four very similar quotations Lombard, and also Altissiodorensis, use *ex se et per se*, while Aquinas says *a se et per se* and Eckhart referring to Augustine, *per se et a se*. The Meister is unquestionably meticulous in his wording yet, on this occasion, rather than suggest a significance in the different prepositions, or ordering, especially because the text is only an *abbreviatio*, it is however reasonably safe to conclude that God is being proposed as possessing power in his being as God, and also having the will to act using this power. Any difference in the ordering of the phrase is unlikely to be significant because of the structure of the two aspects simply being added (although, later in n. 10, the ordering of the aspects involved leads to a clear difference in thought). This being the case, then Eckhart has wrapped up Lombard with Augustine to consider power as the potentiality to act, and thereby pointing to a restriction in things God does based on his will, which is through his own unique nature, and seen in his action. From what has been recorded in the actual text so far, it might be speculation to suggest any alignments, or otherwise, between himself, Augustine and Thomas, but during the rest of the text the Meister leaves no doubt as to his own position in relation to the other two.

The difference in time between the late patristic and early scholastic periods saw the development and refinement to the question of a power distinction and the Meister is able to introduce his own ideas on the power of God and the distinction, by reflecting on the treatments of his notable predecessors. In terms of historical development, as seen in chapter one, Augustine is a key figure in the establishing the notion implied by the term omnipotence and he acknowledged God only does what he chooses to do, but that this does not mean any deficiency of power.

Deus quidem ex se, et per se potest; homo autem vel angelus, quantum que beatus est, non est potens ex se vel per se.'

**n. 9 The counter argument: This only explains how [the way in which] power works.
n. 10 Therefore I say it [God's power] is to be considered rather as absolute power because it should be considered insofar as it extends to all things which do not involve a contradiction, because it is considered as referring to everything that is possible.**

Also, the power of God would otherwise be limited if we considered it as relating to something.

Likewise, when we refer to God's knowledge, we say that God is omniscient because he knows everything [and] it is also the same when referring to power. [He is omnipotent because he is able to do everything].

Now, why is it not said that God is omnivulent? [wills everything?]

In response I say that he only wills those things to which he applies his knowledge or power.

And notice that he is not said to be omnipotent because in him would be the power to do everything, but because he is able to do everything that is possible

N. 9 is a simple statement acting as a hinge connecting this treatment in *Question six* with historical views from Augustine through to the scholastic treatments and even canonist interpretations of the later 13th century. The marginal mark pointing to n. 9 as sub-point three of point three, connects this statement with the earlier ones of n. 7 and n. 8, especially the previous one presenting the thought of Augustine. Beginning with a '*contra*' though also connects with the first '*contra*', which is the counter argument, proposing God's power should be considered as absolute. The 'only' is significant for Eckhart who is pointing to the weaknesses with these historical treatments and that he favours the notion that views power other than by simply considering how it works. N. 9 links with nn. 7 and 8 but is effectively opening the way for the Meister to expand on the initial counter argument of n. 2.

If he is making the statement that the views of his predecessors just related power to action, Eckhart would be aware of his own over-generalising, although early discussion did tend to focus on what God is actually able to do, and it was only during the 13th century that a keener interest in understanding the idea of *potentia absoluta* grew. Augustine certainly focussed on power as the ability to perform an action and preserved the sense of God being unrestricted, except by choice. Forward to mediaeval times and Damian likewise was looking to express how God should be able to do everything with the focus on action, as were Anselm and Abelard. Lombard further explored the difference between capacity and volition by considering how such constraints as time and language effected our understanding, but this was still in relation to action. Godfrey of Poitiers, William of Auxerre and Hugh of St Victor used the ideas of conditionality and justice when exploring the power distinction and the best terms to frame it. Into the early

part of the 13th century, power was generally considered in relation to action, and when Alexander of Hales proposed the sphere of action greater than the *ordinata*, and this was the *absoluta*, this was still in the context of works.⁴⁸⁷ It was acknowledged that God must possess power but absolute power remained either equivalent to power in action, or the power needed to do everything possible for God to do, and this remained the case before ensuing philosophical revisions.

Rather than focus on the actions God does, the 13th century saw the discussion move from how God works to considering God in his essence. Arabic and Greek ideas were embraced thoughtfully rather than emphatically by Albert and Thomas who were instrumental in something of a shift of focus from the *potentia ordinata* to the *absoluta* and to some extent this is presented by the development from n. 9 to n. 10. It is important to note what is meant by the term *absoluta* because, as with *ordinata*, the term was used in a number of different ways. Building on Avicenna's idea that essence is possible without existence, the intrinsic concept of power could now be considered, enabling the possibility for power irrespective of operation. Albert acknowledged power in its essence and also makes the distinction between the power that could do all the things that possibly could be done, and the power that actually does things. As seen earlier, Thomas also spoke of power in its essence, the potential power to do anything possible and the power actualised when the action does not contain a contradiction or repugnancy and is simply befitting for God to do.⁴⁸⁸ Absolute power, according to Thomas, connects with essence rather than action as if it would be a contradiction to consider the two together, and he is more concerned than Eckhart to make the distinction between action and power.

Eckhart proposed that absolute power was the capacity to do everything possible, which is quite similar to the literal notion of the term omnipotence. This is the reason, explained

⁴⁸⁷ See Alexander of Hales, Alexander of Hales, *Summa Halensis*, Pt. I, inq. 1, tr. 4, q. 1, m. 4 (1924), I, 135 see footnote 218, 219.

⁴⁸⁸ See Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia* q. 1, a. 5, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 18a: '*Praeterea, in Deo duo contradictoria simul esse non possunt. Sed absolutum et regulatum contradictionem implicant; nam absolutum est quod secundum se consideratur; illud vero quod regulatur, ordinem ad aliud habet. Ergo in Deo non debet poni potentia absoluta et regulata.*'

above, why it is right to call God ‘Omnipotent’.⁴⁸⁹ Absolute power remained an ambiguous expression of God’s power, with uncertainty over whether it should be related to God in essence or action or both. It is maybe because there were different concepts of *de potentia absoluta*, sitting somewhere between the two fixed positions of either just abstract or concrete ideas, that it could be deliberately misconstrued, or at least distorted by adapting it conveniently into canonical issues.

From this context, Eckhart described the nature of absolute power in n. 5, and then, the question of a power distinction framed in n. 6 points to the need to consider God in his essence and this is in contrast with earlier views cited in nn. 7 and 8. In n. 10 Eckhart presents his solution within the framework of the argument beginning with a strong, ‘*dico igitur*’ emphasising both that this statement is in the light of the previous ones and also that this is his own view as opposed to that of anyone else. He also uses the term *magis* to emphasise that this is his own view, and this is a contrasting answer from the ones previously given. The *potentia absoluta* is defined as the power that can do everything possible and the limit of possibility is based upon whether or not the thing that could be done involves a contradiction. This is the counter argument of n. 2 in which it is added that this *absoluta* contains more than what is contained within the *potentia ordinata*.

When first presented at the head of the question, Eckhart answered by linking the *et videtur* with *potentia ordinata*, and now his own answer proposes the counter argument that God’s power needs to be considered as *potentia absoluta*. He maintains that God’s power is absolute in that it applies to everything, or as *respicit* in n. 2 has been translated, comprises, everything that does not involve a contradiction. *Respicit* suggests the idea of containing and maybe, using a more modern idiom, it might be appropriate to say God’s absolute power is able to do everything that comes ‘under the umbrella’ of not involving a contradiction. This picture of a raised umbrella protecting everything underneath, presents the idea of containing everything possible but Eckhart also states that by only

⁴⁸⁹ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 32 (LW II 38,1-7): ‘*Patet ergo quod deus iuxta nomen “omnipotens” potest omnia et potest quaecumque posse est potentiae. E converso quaecumque dicitur deus non posse, ideo dicitur, vel quia illa non sunt nec sunt entia nec in numero omnium, sed quoddam nihil omnium; vel haec dicitur deus non posse, quia posse huiusmodi non est posse nec ad potentiam pertinet sed ad impotentiam, sicut posse deficere et posse vinci accidit utique ex impotentia, qua non potest resisti corrumpenti et vincenti.*’

considering the way in which power works, this is not a complete picture. Rather than an umbrella, maybe a *kratera* portrays a truer sense of Eckhart's notion of omnipotence. The *kratera* could be perceived as the container of God's essence which actively bubbles up and boils over. Absolute power for Eckhart is this boiling and over-boiling, emanating activity. Stretching the metaphor a little further could equate the umbrella with the thoughts of Thomas, such that all that is done is contained under the umbrella, and anything else that possibly could be done, is done when it comes under the umbrella. The difference is that the umbrella asserts containment and order whereas the *kratera* heightens the thought of dynamic activity. Thomas contains the *ordinata* within the *absoluta*, although he is only prepared to limit the effects of power rather than power,⁴⁹⁰ but Eckhart considers the *ordinata* as being done continuously *absoluta*. Markus Vinzent explains how Eckhart, in *Parisian Question four* shows that God and the heavens should not be seen as a closed container space and this notion of space goes beyond those of Albert and Thomas, as taken from a discussion on Aristotle's *Physics*.⁴⁹¹ God is the unlimited container, and 'as the principle itself has no spatial and temporal splits, but is only the condition for any form of spatiality and temporality, so also the container space should not be misread as a closed location or a particular place, but as the condition and potential for space.'⁴⁹² This contrast is maybe seen in pedagogic style in that, whereas Thomas sets out many questions which he duly answers in a concrete fashion, Eckhart in a more speculative manner sometimes leaves his audience still asking questions. Whereas Thomas is renowned for his compendium of theology, Eckhart is often regarded as a mystic.

⁴⁹⁰ See Thom. Aqu., *Qd. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 2, resp. 13, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 12b: '*Ad decimumtertium dicendum, quod Deus semper agit tota sua potentia; sed effectus terminatur secundum imperium voluntatis, et ordinem rationis.*' q. 1 a. 3, resp. 5, (ed.) Marietti (1953), 15a: '*Praeterea, omne quod resistit alicui, resistit in ratione alicuius oppositionis. Sed potentiae divinae nihil est oppositum, ut ex supra dictis patet. Ergo ei nihil potest resistere; et ita potest facere omnia impossibilia.*'

⁴⁹¹ M. Vinzent, 'Eckhart on Space and Time' (2016), 59-62. See Aristotle, *Phys.* VI 6, 236b 33; Th. Aqu., *In Phys.* IV c. I lectio I n. 7, II 147; Albert, *Phys.* IV tr. I c. 2, III 260a; Eckhart, *In Gen.* I n. 49, LW I/2, 220,1-221,6.

⁴⁹² M. Vinzent, 'Eckhart on Space and Time' (2016), 62.

In his *Commentary on Exodus*, Eckhart refers to Augustine in order to explain how God is almighty by reason of his substance, but his substance is not related to any other thing,⁴⁹³ and this helps to explain how God is total power in himself. The Meister does not distinguish essence from action, and so while God remains *actus purus*, the *distinctio rationis* is still necessary. Power always relates to reasoned action but it is not like the awareness we have as creation that in terms of quantity, each task requires a certain amount of power, because God uses his total power in every action. The contrast is made between power which is regarded as infinite and able to action every possibility, and alternatively the limited, and thereby measurable amount of power related to a specific action. The *potentia absoluta* comprises all actuality and so, as seen in n. 3, refers to all intrinsic and extrinsic action although this should not be considered by referring to any particular action. When the woman who had been haemorrhaging for twelve years touched Jesus, he knew that power (δύναμιν) had gone out from him.⁴⁹⁴ It was not that an amount used was noticeable because of him becoming weaker, but acknowledgement that power, when considered practically, is related to action. This incident conveys the idea that power is not to be thought of in terms of quantity, because in God it is immeasurable. There is no need to presuppose that if more power were needed then it would be available. Likewise it is not the case that God has enough power because through his foreknowledge, he knows, and always did know, what potentiality is actualised in each action and this is all that is ever needed. Eckhart introduces the constraint of foreknowledge, or foresight, in n. 12 and so it is suffice here to say the Meister is always keen to propose God's power should never be thought of as limited. By considering God as *maxime actus*, God is total power or power of the highest or ultimate degree, so it cannot be said there is more of God, or that more power exists as that would be nonsense because it is impossible to quantify God and hence the notion that God is infinite, and in this case infinite power. In reference to actions there is no limit to number nor any degree of difficulty to the things

⁴⁹³ See Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 64 (LW II 69,2-4, 7-8): '*propter quod deus substantia sua est sapiens, bonus, omnipotens et huiusmodi, non autem substantia sua est relatus ad alterum quippiam ... Haec est ergo ratio, quare omne genus accidentis transit in substantiam in deo praeter relationem.*' See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V, c. 5, n. 6.

⁴⁹⁴ *Luke* 8:46: '*et dixit Iesus tetigit me aliquis nam ego novi virtutem de me exisse.*' See *Luke* 8:43-8. See J.A. Fitzmyer, 'The Gospel According to Luke, with Introduction, Translation and Notes' (1979), 742-7.

God could do, because he would not then be omnipotent. Therefore, absolute power for Eckhart is not simply the greatest quantity of power needed to perform all possible actions, but is the very essence of God in unlimited, total action.

When speaking of power as God's essence there can be no question of limit but here the Meister explains that if power were to be considered as *ordinata*, then by being related to something, it would be limited. From Peter Damian's question of the virgin there was always the need to express the problem of an apparent limit to God's power and Eckhart's line, here in the established terms of the debate, is clear that power should not be considered as merely *potentia ordinata*. Power related to action points to limitation, but power as the potentiality to do everything possible, holds no such limit.

The contrast between God being infinite rather than limited is proposed by the Meister in the passage from his *Commentary on Wisdom* considered earlier presenting the connection between oneness, indistinction and perfection, and,

furthermore there is an indistinction that concerns God's nature, both because he is infinite, and also because he is not determined by the confines or limits of any genera or beings. But it is the nature of any created being to be determined and limited by the fact that it is created, as we read [*Sap.* 11:21], "You have ordered all things in measure, and number and weight."⁴⁹⁵

As seen above, Eckhart presents the notion that God is indistinct, and he is indistinct because he is infinite, and secondly as the infinite creator, contrasted with creation in being neither limited nor determined. In his very nature, God is infinite unlike everything else which is determined by him as creator. This paradox of how creation is both indistinct from its creator and yet measurable in its own nature is described earlier with the analogy of the chest and its maker. Understanding how being indistinct is shown by infinity is further explained in Eckhart's comments on *Exodus* on existence being outside of number:

⁴⁹⁵ Eckhart, *In Sap.* n. 144 (LW II 482,5-9), '*Rursus de natura dei est indistinctio, tum quia infinitus, tum quia non determinatus ad terminos et limites alicuius generum sive entium. De natura vero creati est esse determinatum et limitatum hoc ipso quod creatum est, infra undecimo: "omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti."* [*Wis.*], 11:21: '*sed omnia mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti.*'

Existence is not counted along with being, nor is form generally with the thing that is formed. Existence and every form is from God as the First Existence and the first Form. Therefore, no distinction can exist or be understood in God himself ... all distinction is repugnant to the infinite. But God is infinite.⁴⁹⁶

This is helpful because infinity is seen, not so much as beyond measure, as immeasurable, or in an over-simplified example, God is not just a bit greater than the greatest amount we can measure, but greatness that we cannot start to measure. God is not infinite in that he is more than everything else but that he is not anything that can be counted and the amount of anything he possesses in himself is immeasurable. Indistinction as infinity is only possible because God is first and the source of everything. This again describes the outflowing of God proposed in nn. 3 and 5. The Meister describes this position experientially in *Predigt 52*:

When I stood in my first cause, I had no cause, and then I was the cause of my own self; I desired nothing, since I was an empty being and I was the act of knowing myself in the enjoyment of the truth. Then I wanted myself, and wanted no other thing; what I wanted, that I was; and what I was, that I wanted. And here I stood empty of God and of all things. But when I went out of my own free will and received my created being, then I had a God; for before the creatures existed, God was not “God”, but he was what he was. But when the creatures came into existence and they received their created being, then God was not in his own self “God”, but he was “God” in the creatures.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 60,1 (LW II 66,4-8): ‘*quia esse cum ente non ponit in numerum, nec universaliter forma cum formato. Esse autem et omnis forma a deo est, utpote primo esse et forma prima. Nulla igitur in ipso deo distinctio esse potest aut intelligi... distinctio omnis infinito repugnat. Deus autem in finitus est.*

⁴⁹⁷ Eckhart, *Pr.* 52 (DW II 492,3-493,2): ‘Dô ich stuont in mîner êrsten sache, dô enhate ich keinen got, und dô was ich sache mîn selbes; dô enwolte ich niht, noch enbegerte ich niht, wan ich was ein ledic sîn und ein bekenner mîn selbes nach gebrûchlîcher warheit. Dô wolte ich mich selben und enwolte kein ander .dinc; daz ich wolte, daz was ich, und daz ich was, daz wolte ich, und hie stuont ich ledicgotes und aller dinge. Aber dô ich ûzgienc von mînem vrîen willen und ich enpfîenc mîn geschaffen wesen, dô hâte ich

Initially this seems to be a self-personal description of being with God or simply being God or rather just *being*, because the idea of God only exists in relation to creation once it comes into being. Eckhart says that it is only once I am a created being, that I recognise distinction between myself and God. This movement from within being to becoming a distinct being explains how two different relations can be described. God is infinite in himself but creation is measurable insofar as a created being is in creation. ‘This or that’ beings are part of the physical, measurable, created world which, from this human perspective, is distinct from God who has brought order through the confines of length, mass, capacity and time. Measures do not determine God, who can only be without confines or limits, therefore God is infinite and God’s power in action, the ‘*maxime actus*’ must be infinite.⁴⁹⁸

For his notion of infinity, the Meister may well be following the thoughts of his Dominican predecessors such as Albert who stated that the name ‘eternal’ pointed to a being without limit in his comments on the *Book of Causes*.⁴⁹⁹

Albert was using what he thought was Aristotle’s work to propose God is the one who has caused everything else and so must be without limit. Thomas likewise, in his first theory for the existence of God, proposes there is no movement without a first mover and this idea is framed in terms of power to explain how all potentiality in God is actualised.⁵⁰⁰ This is also presented in *Summa contra Gentiles* in which he contrasts prime matter, which has potency, with God who only has actuality.

But, since potency is said relatively to act, it cannot exceed act either in a particular case or absolutely. Hence, since prime matter is infinite in its potentiality, it remains that God, who is pure act, is infinite in his actuality. Moreover, an act is all the more perfect by as much as it has

einen got; wan ê die crêatûren wâren, dô enwas got niht ,got', mêr: er was, daz er was. Aber dô die crêatûren gewurden und sie enpfingen ir geschaffen wesen, dô enwas got niht ,got' in im selben, mêr: er was ,got' in den crêatûren.’ Trans. E. College and B. McGinn (1981).

⁴⁹⁸ See Eckhart, *In Sap.* n. 146 (LW II 484,3-4): ‘*Deus autem, utpote nullo genere finitus et limitatus aut finibus comprehensus, infinitus est.*’

⁴⁹⁹ See Albert Magnus, *Liber de Causis et Processu Universitatis a Prima Causa*, L. II, tr. 1, c. 8, (ed.) Colon., Vol. XVII 2), p. 69.

⁵⁰⁰ See Thom. Aqu., *S. Th.*, Ia, q. 2, a. 3; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII 1072a.

less of potency mixed with it. Hence, every act with which potency is mixed is terminated in its perfection. But God is pure act without any potency ... He is, therefore, infinite.⁵⁰¹

Thomas presents prime matter not as substance but potential, although this potential is based on actual substance, and whatever it is, its actuality could not exceed its potential even if this is infinite. Therefore God who is pure action, not just potential action, is infinite actuality. Clearly from this, God only has actuality, and although the text initially seems to connect potency with imperfection on a continuum such that 100% potency is 0% actuality and vice versa with variations possible, it later affirms the view that being infinite means God in his perfection is 100% actuality and 0% potentiality.

This idea of all potentiality being actualised might seem inconsistent with his view presented in the *Sentences* text considered in chapter one in which he deals with the generation of the Son from the Father and related issues. In his *Sentences Commentary*, Thomas describes the *potentia absoluta* as being the power that could do anything possible while all actuality is attributed to the *potentia ordinata* but with the possibility for extra potentiality in the *absoluta* is kept open. This seems to suggest there could be unrealised potentiality but the text, above from *Summa contra Gentiles*, connects infinity and actuality, and dismisses any idea of unrealised power. Thomas maybe amended his view, in this slightly later work, to propose all potentiality is actualised or alternatively he regarded absolute power as infinite when being considered as essence but finite and directed when considered as action.

Either way, it seems the concept of infinity might have been an awkward one for Thomas to reconcile consistently within his overall thinking and this is seen in his *Q.d. De potentia* in which he treats this issue by referring to John Damascene declaring that the infinite is that which neither time nor place nor mind can grasp. He also refers to Hilary stating that

⁵⁰¹ Thom. Aqu., *S.c.G.*, 1, 43, 6-7, (ed.) Leon (Rome, 1918): ‘*Sed potentia, cum dicatur ad actum, non potest actum excedere, sicut nec in unoquoque, ita nec simpliciter. Cum igitur materia prima sit infinita in sua potentialitate, relinquatur quod Deus, qui est actus purus, sit infinitus in sua actualitate. Item. Tanto actus aliquis perfectior est, quanto minus habet potentiae permixtum. Unde omnis actus cui permiscetur potentia, habet terminum suae perfectionis: cui autem non permiscetur aliqua potentia, est absque termino perfectionis. Deus autem est actus purus absque omni potentia... Est igitur infinitus.*’ Trans. A.C. Pegis.

God's power is immeasurable, before concluding that because this is the same for divine power, then God's power is infinite.⁵⁰² From this point Thomas presents how this power as a quantity should only be predicated of God in the negative sense that God is beyond limits ascribed to him, and to all that is in him, because privations point to imperfections, but when,

ascribed to God and to all that is in him, because he himself, his essence, his wisdom, his power, his goodness are all without limit, wherefore in him all is infinite.⁵⁰³

Power is listed alongside essence as something ascribed to God without limit. The contrast is made between God who is infinite act and man whose actions are limited. The limits of creation are seen by the agent doing the act and who or whatever is in receipt of the action. He adds:

Now God's action is not limited by any agent, because it proceeds from no other but himself: nor is it limited by any recipient, because since there is no passive potency in him, he is pure self-subsistent act ... But we must note that, although his power is infinite by reason of his essence, nevertheless from the very fact that we refer it to the things whereof it is the source, it has a certain mode of infinity which the essence has not ... divine power is infinite: since never does it produce so many effects that it cannot produce more; nor does it ever act with such intensity, that it cannot act more intensely. But in the divine operation intensity is not measured according as operation is in the operator, for then it is always infinite, since God's operation is his

⁵⁰² See Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 2, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1953), 11; John Damascene, *Orthodox Faith*, Book 1, c. 1, NPNF, Series 2, vol. 9; Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, viii, NPNF, Series 2, vol. 9.

⁵⁰³ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 2, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: '*quae longe a Deo est. Infinitum autem dictum negative convenit Deo quantum ad omnia quae in ipso sunt. Quia nec ipse aliquo finitur, nec eius essentia, nec sapientia, nec potentia, nec bonitas; unde omnia in ipso sunt infinita.*'

essence, but according as it attains its effect, for thus some things are moved by God more efficaciously, some less.⁵⁰⁴

Thomas is making the point that God's power in its essence is infinite and not subject to any limitation. Operation and essence are connected but only according to the effects of power as with the text above from the same article, which proposed power should be thought of as unlimited and it is rather the effects of power that are limited by God's will, and order of reason. Again the thought is emphasised that when God acts, he does so from his divine power and all operation is from his essence. However, there is also a clue to the proposal made in the notes above on n. 5, that there is an analogous relation between the different modes of power. In one mode, power in its essence is infinite and in yet another mode, connected with action, it is measurable. Power actualised from the mode of essence is infinite but from the angle of the one receiving the operation it can be measured. In the line at the top of this text, Thomas emphasises that God's power is not restricted by the recipient of the operation but the closing lines do suggest the power used is quantifiable. This is one way to consider Thomas' idea of potentiality. God's action could not be limited by anything outside of himself but there is a limit to the potentiality and therefore using this logic, a sense in which not all potentiality is actualised. This suggests there may be some ambiguity within Thomas' treatment of infinity, and this is demonstrated by Eckhart in his comments on the *Exodus* text, 'the Lord has reigned for ever and beyond'. The Meister states that this,

⁵⁰⁴ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 2, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: '*Ipse autem divinus actus non finitur ex aliquo agente, quia non est ab alio, sed est a se ipso; neque finitur ex alio recipiente, quia cum nihil potentiae passivae ei admisceatur, ipse est actus purus non receptus in aliquot ... Sed sciendum quod quamvis potentia habeat infinitatem ex essentia, tamen ex hoc ipso quod comparatur ad ea quorum est principium, recipit quemdam modum infinitatis quem essentia non habet ... divina potentia est infinita. Nam nunquam tot effectus facit quin plures facere possit, nec unquam ita intense operatur quin intensius operari possit. Intensio autem in operatione divina non est attendenda secundum quod operatio est in operante, quia sic semper est infinita, cum operatio sit divina essentia; sed attendenda est secundum quod attingit effectum; sic enim a Deo moventur quaedam efficacius, quaedam minus efficaciter.*'

Plainly and briefly intends to say that his kingdom will always and infinitely stand beyond any measure of counting or conceiving.⁵⁰⁵

[However]:

Thomas has a wonderful saying ... about the infinity of the thoughts and affections of hearts that are known by God with the knowledge of vision. This is obscure to many, and I cannot remember anyone before Thomas who said it. Not even Thomas himself in other places says about this knowledge of vision, but only about the knowledge of simple understanding.⁵⁰⁶

In the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas speaks of the knowledge of God as a simple understanding but one that is a direct, immediate, and exhaustive knowledge of all things, even things that are not and infinite things. Likewise, in his *Summa Theologia*, Thomas refers to a ‘knowledge of vision’ of infinite things: ‘God knows even the thoughts and affections of hearts, which will be multiplied to infinity as rational creatures go on for ever.’ As Markus Vinzent points out, Thomas could never hold to things being infinite because that would contradict the orthodox idea that generation is finite and yet ‘Eckhart feels himself entitled to highlight this extraordinary, if not conflicting, statement as support for his own view that the ongoing kingdom is infinite, because potentiality and actuality of things are immeasurable and inconceivable and can only be known by God himself.’⁵⁰⁷ Thomas could only perceive there to be a time before time, or eternity outside of time in order for God to be ‘Principle’ and distinct from creation, but Eckhart proposed

⁵⁰⁵ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 86 (LW II 89,4-6): ‘*Ultimo breviter et plane, cum dicitur: “dominus regnavit in aeternum et ultra”, vult dicere quod ultra quam possit numerari aut cogitari semper in infinitum stabit regnum eius.*’

⁵⁰⁶ Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 86 (LW II 89,6-10): ‘*Secundum quem modum Thomas optime dicit p. I q. 14 a. 20 quod cogitationes et affectiones cordium sunt infinitae et sciuntur a deo scientia visionis, quod multis obscurum est; nec memini me ab aliquo ante Thomam esse dictum. Sed nec ipse Thomas alibi fortassis invenitur hoc sensisse de scientia visionis, sed tantum de scientia simplicis intelligentiae.*’ See Thom. Aqu. *S Th.* I q. 14, a. 12, (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888); *S.c.G.*, I c. 49-69 (ed.) Leon (Rome, 1918).

⁵⁰⁷ M. Vinzent, *Detachment* (2011), 2-3.

God acts continuously in the eternal now, or '*nunc aeternitas*'.⁵⁰⁸ This means no distinction between *bullitio* and *ebullitio* but one actualising absolute action.

This statement of Eckhart in n. 10, concerning the limited nature of power related to action, might also be referring, in a more subtle way than others referred to in nn. 7 and 8, to Thomas among those who hold the view that power can be considered in this related way. When speaking of power in its essence both meisters speak of this as infinite but Thomas has expressed two modes of absolute power in which the one related to action is measurable and thereby limited, whereas Eckhart has defined God's power as absolute because it is unlimited. This thoughtful difference in the use of word 'absolute' reflects Eckhart's emphasis of there being one emanating action of God.

The proposition that God's power is unlimited, and indeed the contrast with Thomas, is developed further as Eckhart continues by presenting knowledge and will as two more aspects attributed to God. In n. 8 the Meister has already considered how it had long been thought how God is perceived as only doing that which he wills to do, but this always remained an open discussion. Here in n. 10 is the second occasion Eckhart has brought the connection between the will of God and omnipotence into the discussion, and this is a major theme running through to the end of *Question six*. The pattern of the debate can be traced by the key words being used in virtually the same sequence in Lombard's *distinction* 43.

The term of 'omniscience' is introduced as referring to the notion that what God knows, he always knows, always and this is everything. The connection between power and knowledge, as seen in chapter one, was made by Lombard with his '*semel scit Deus, semper sciat et semper scierit*' formula and as with power, it is beyond human imagination to consider how every particular act is known. Eckhart, by using similar terms is pointing to the thought that God knows everything, and so he must have the power to do everything.

⁵⁰⁸ See J. Casteight, 'What does "in the principle" mean? Eternity and time in the first article of the Votum Avenionense' (forthcoming, 2016). Julie Casteight presents how the Meister presents his idea of creation in connection with eternity in his *Commentary on Genesis*, *In Gen.* I, n. 7 (LW I/2 65, 8-12, 12-23), and this became the first article to be declared as heretical by the Bull, '*In agro dominico*' of 1329. See also McGinn, *Essentials* (1981), 40-1.

This idea is presented by Thomas when treating the question of why God is called Almighty:

It would seem that the reason is because he can simply do all things.
For he is called almighty in the same way as he is called omniscient.
Now he is called omniscient because he simply knows all things.
Therefore he is called almighty because he can simply do all things.⁵⁰⁹

And in response:

God is called omniscient because he knows all things knowable. Now the false are not knowable and therefore he knows them not: and things impossible in themselves are compared to power as the false are compared to knowledge.⁵¹⁰

Everything that is possible to be known is known by God. The parallel between God knowing everything and having the power to do everything is generally accepted, and power and knowledge are said to be infinite, especially in the sense that they are incomprehensible from the viewpoint of creation. Thomas adds that the logic used to explain how there is nothing existing that God does not know, is the same as that showing that if something cannot be done, then it does not exist. If something exists, then God knows about it, and it exists through his power. Existence for God determines both omniscience and omnipotence.

Breaking down the Latin terms in this way, by using *omni* as a prefix, the compound term points to everything, and it was the adoption of this term, omnipotent, that quickly became a catalyst for the power debate. Having made a point that is easy to establish using the prefix '*omni*', Eckhart throws a third '*omni*' into the pot which had also featured previously in discussions about God's power. The words *omnia* and *scientem* are separate but combined in English usage to present the notion of all-knowingness in the way that *omni* and *potent* present all-powerfulness and here *omnia* and *volentem* are linked to

⁵⁰⁹ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, art. 7, arg. 1, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: '*quare Deus dicatur omnipotens. Et videtur quod dicatur omnipotens quia simpliciter omnia possit. Sicut enim Deus dicitur omnipotens, ita dicitur omnisciens. Sed dicitur omnisciens, quia simpliciter omnia scit. Ergo et omnipotens dicitur, quia simpliciter omnia potest.*'

⁵¹⁰ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 7, r. 1, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: '*quod Deus dicitur omnisciens quia scit omnia scibilia; falsa autem, quae non sunt scibilia, nescit. Impossibilia autem secundum se comparantur ad potentiam sicut falsa ad scientiam.*'

present the idea of willing everything. I have used the terms omniscient and omnipotent in translation, and so for the purpose of emphasising the parallel being made, I have kept the term ‘omnivolent’ as the Anglicised term. The question is one asked by Thomas in the same manner:

If God is called almighty and all-knowing, why is he not also called all-willing?⁵¹¹

The single word ‘*omnivolens*’ has been translated as all-willing but in English, this is ambiguous in that it could refer to submissive acceptance of everything, rather than active willing of everything. In the context of a sentence referring to omniscience and omnipotence it seems best to keep the Latin term *omnivolens* (omnivulence), alongside omnipotence and omniscience. The link between being able and being willing had been famously made much earlier by Epicurus stating:

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.

Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?

Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?⁵¹²

Clearly Epicurus (or probably just Hume), was making a particular point in denial of God but this logic, from a human perspective, explains why it is impossible to be both all-powerful and actively all-willing. The Meister explains that God could not will everything because he only wills the things that are within his knowledge and power. The connection being made between knowledge and power is consistent with the idea that anything else does not exist. This affirms that God has power for everything, therefore he is omnipotent, and he knows everything, therefore he is omniscient, however when considering the will, this would introduce a contradiction if God were to will everything, therefore he is not omnivolent.

⁵¹¹ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, art. 7, arg. 5, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: ‘*Item quaeritur quare Deus dicitur omnipotens et omnisciens, et non omnivolens.*’

⁵¹² This quote is generally attributed to Epicurus although not referenced, and the thought was adopted by Church Father, Lactantius, as part of an apology in *De ira Dei* and then first used in this format by David Hume in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1907), 134.

Eckhart could well be pointing to this same question when asked by Thomas in his *Q.d. De potentia*⁵¹³ as to why God is not called omnivolent, and he must have been aware that Thomas is careful in his response not to equate God's will with the infinite nature of God's knowledge and power:

in voluntary actions, power and knowledge (as stated in *Metaph.* ix, 2, 5) are brought into action by the will: wherefore in God power and knowledge are described in universal terms as being without limit, as when we say that God is all-knowing and almighty: whereas the will, seeing that it is the determining force, cannot cover all things, but only those to which it determines power and knowledge: hence God cannot be called all-willing.⁵¹⁴

The will is limited according to the things it determines and consequently brings into action. Thomas cites Aristotle, describing how in order for something to be done well, then it must at least be done and yet, just because something is done, it does not necessarily mean it is done well.⁵¹⁵ From his own *Commentary on Metaphysics*, Thomas describes how there are different types of potency but when the one acting with potency is using reason, then contrary options are involved.⁵¹⁶ Or in other words, decision making implies there must be a choice opposed to what is not chosen. God can only do what is right, and these things that are done, are the things God must be willing to do, and so God

⁵¹³ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, art. 7, arg. 5, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a, above.

⁵¹⁴ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1, a. 7, r. 5, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23b: '*in his quae aguntur per voluntatem, ut dicitur IX Metaph., potentia et scientia determinantur ad opus per voluntatem; et ideo scientia et potentia in Deo quasi non determinata universaliter pronuntiantur, ut cum dicitur omnisciens vel omnipotens, sed voluntas quae determinat, non potest esse omnium, sed eorum tantum ad quae potentiam et scientiam determinat; et ideo Deus non potest dici omnivolens.*'

⁵¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book XI 2, 5, from Thom. Aqu., *Commentary on Metaphysics*: 'It is also evident that a potency for doing something well involves the potency of merely doing something or undergoing some change. But the latter does not always involve the former; for he who does a thing well must do it, but he who does something need not do it well.'

⁵¹⁶ See Thom. Aqu., *Commentary on Metaphysics* Book 9, 1768-85.

has not done any alternative action making him unwilling to do that action and therefore he cannot be all-willing.

In answer to his own question, concerning God being said to be all-willing in the way that he is all-powerful and all-knowing, Eckhart links the three by saying God's will is not infinite, but limited by the application of knowledge and power, a limitation which is not "outside" of God. Many factors have been seen to influence whether or not God does something and for God to do anything he has to be willing to do it. Being willing has been expressed in terms of his nature because God could only act in consistency with himself. Eckhart uses the two terms here, *scientia* and *potentia*, but not in a random way because these are the two terms just put forward in the reasoning behind why God is not omnivolent. Eckhart and Aquinas affirm the restricted nature of the will of God in contrast with knowledge and power. However, this response of the Meister proposes that acts of the will follow the knowledge and power of God, whereas Thomas sees the will as determining the actions of knowledge and power. Eckhart repeats Thomas' question on *omnivolens* closely and so this change of order may be a less than subtle, reversal in the process involved, reflecting the contrasting ideas of the two meisters. Eckhart consistently looks to emphasise oneness in God, but Aquinas' ordering of events here suggests God's knowledge and power follow God's will, meaning that power and knowledge are secondary, although it is still the will which is limited. For Thomas, God's will is not changed by his power, yet while God's power does not change, its effects can be limited by his will.

Eckhart presented how power should be understood earlier in n. 5 and the activation of knowledge, will and power are in this singular action and so this question of the ordering predicates cuts deeply to Eckhart's fundamental notion of God and the primacy of intellect.⁵¹⁷ In his first *Parisian question* Eckhart shows how the prologue of *John* states that it is the 'Word' in the beginning, and not 'being' in the beginning, and that the idea of a word, whether considering either the speaker or what is spoken, relates to intellect. Everything owes its being to God as *intelligere* and therefore it is this intellect that 'is', and is the revelation to Moses in the revelation of 'I am who I am'. Oneness in God is preserved, and emphasised, by everything flowing from intellect. Markus Enders explains how Eckhart places God above Being in this question and yet points to God as Being in the *Prologus generalis in Opus tripartitum* and concludes the 'difference lies in the

⁵¹⁷ M. Enders, 'Meister Eckhart's Understanding of God' (2013), 361-70.

grounding of the Being of God in his knowing'.⁵¹⁸ God is above any sense of creaturely being as well as being 'Pure Being'. Eckhart moves on to show how *intelligere* is ahead of existence, or being, or essence, and therefore power which it effects:

In God there is no passive potentiality. But there would be unless understanding and existence were the same in God ...

In God existence itself is his act of understanding for he acts and knows through his existence ... he exists because he understands. God is an intellect and understanding, and his understanding itself is the ground of his existence.⁵¹⁹

Intelligere, translated here as understanding *is* before anything and from this comes the source of everything including God as we comprehend him, and all his nature, and anything we predicate of him including power. This priority of intellect, according to Jens Halfwassen, places thinking at 'the highest and most proper definition of the absolute, on which all other definitions that apply to God, including precisely his Being, are based.'⁵²⁰ To follow this through, everything coming from intellect bears the form of this intellect and hence there is the oneness continually inferred. This placing of existence after intellect is confirmed when the Meister states his aim is not to deny God, by saying God is not existence, but acknowledge God as the cause of all existence:

⁵¹⁸ M. Enders, 'Meister Eckhart's Understanding of God' (2013), 370. See Meister Eckhart, *Prolog. gen. in Opus tripartitum*, n. 11 (LW I/2, 29,12-3): '*Prima igitur propositio est: Esse est deus. Prima quaestio de divinitate: Utrum deus sit.*'

⁵¹⁹ Eckhart, *Quaest. Par.* I, n. 2, 3, 4 (LW V 38,7-8, ... 40,3-4, ... 40,5-11): '*Quarto, quia in deo nulla est potentia passiva. Esset autem, nisi intelligere et esse sint idem in deo ... et sic in deo ipsum esse est ipsum [intelligere], quia ipso esse operatur et intelligit ... ostendo quod non ita videtur mihi modo, ut quia sit, ideo intelligat, sed quia intelligit, ideo est, ita quod deus est intellectus et intelligere et est ipsum intelligere fundamentum ipsius esse. Quia dicitur Ioh. 1: "in principio erat verbum, et verbum erat apud deum, et deus erat verbum". Non autem dixit evangelista: "in principio erat ens et deus erat ens". Verbum autem se toto est ad intellectum et est ibi dicens vel dictum et non esse vel ens commixtum.*'

⁵²⁰ J. Halfwassen, 'Gibt es ein Philosophie der Subjektivität im Mittelalter? Zur Theorie des Intellekts bei Meister Eckhart und Dietrich von Freiburg' (1997), 343.

I deny nothing to God that is his by nature, asserting as I do that God precontains everything in purity, fullness and perfection, more abundantly and extensively, because he is the ground and cause of all things. And this is what he intended to say when he declared “I am who I am.”⁵²¹

This is why Eckhart can say, and indeed maintain, that God only wills the things to which he applies his knowledge and power. There is no passive potentiality with Eckhart because God is total actuality and so God does everything possible, and this as shown earlier, is in this singular action of the *maxime actus*.

Eckhart’s consistency in this issue seems to contrast with Thomas who, as far as he was concerned, had shown a certain ambiguity. Although in his *Q.d. De potentia* Thomas states there is no passive potentiality and ‘proves there is no passive power in God’⁵²² and, as seen above, this is supported in his *Summa contra Gentiles* there does seem to be a difference between potentiality and actuality as presented in both his *Summa Theologica* and *Scriptum Sententiarum*.

The ordering of power, knowledge and will is presented differently according to how God is understood. For Thomas, creation is an act of the will and therefore there is distinction between God and creation. God is Subsistent Being itself,⁵²³ and because he must be a thinking as well as active being, then God is also intellect, but this *intelligere* could not exist apart from being, even if in a way distinct from being. This means everything comes from *intelligere*, including every being, and so upholds the standard Dominican position of the primacy of intellect in contrast with the Franciscan emphasis of the will and love of God as held by such as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure and Duns Scotus.

The Meister continues to treat the relation between God’s power and his will from n. 8 onwards and so it is not a side issue and in doing so he is not just making a point about the will of God but demonstrating the consistency within his own argument. This change

⁵²¹ Eckhart, *Quaest. Par.* I, n. 12 (LW V 48,5-8): ‘*Nihil igitur nego deo, ut sibi natum est convenire. Dico enim quod deus omnia praehabet in puritate, plenitudine, perfectione, amplius et latius, existens radix et causa omnium. Et hoc voluit dicere, cum dixit: “ego sum qui sum”*’.

⁵²² Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1 a. 7, r. 5, (ed.) Marietti (1956): ‘*quod ratio illa probat quod in Deo non sit potentia passiva.*’

⁵²³ See Thom. Aqu., S.Th. Ia, q. 8, a. 1, (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888).

of order by Eckhart seems to be placing Thomas closer to the Franciscan camp, or at least towards Augustine, and thereby sowing the slightly acerbic thought that, in comparison with himself, Thomas is concerned to emphasise the will of God in determining actualised power, and this is further developed in the closing paragraphs.

The final statement of n. 10 is introduced with *et nota quod*, and so, once again it is emphasised that it is important to give attention to the idea that there is a difference between being able to do everything, and being able to do everything that is possible. There is no argument to support the idea that God does everything. This again is a hinge, because it both closes out this paragraph and leads forward to the closing paragraphs which should be considered together as they form the final sequential steps of this treatment.

n. 11 To this [first] argument it must be said that out of [his] absolute power God can do things that are not decent now. But if they were done, then they would be decent and just.

n. 12 But you [may] ask [against this], ‘Can he only do something, if he has foreseen it?’

To this it should be said that, if this ‘if’ refers to the things he has actually done, then this is true. Because he has foreseen anything he has done [does].

But if this ‘if’ refers to what he is able to do, then it is false.

n. 13 But you [may] say [against this] that Augustine in ‘*Enchiridion*’ states that, ‘he [God] is omnipotent because “he can do everything he wills”, not because “he can do everything”.’

n. 14 To this it should be said that Augustine says ‘wills’ because by ‘everything’ he also understood to include the evil things that God is not able to do.

And that is why he [Augustine] spoke in this way.

A re-visiting of the question of omnipotence takes place in this final section with gaining an understanding of the will of God as the key to understanding the initial argument. The idea that God does not do everything possible was raised in n. 1 as a means to explain the difference between the *ordinata* and *absoluta*. The counter argument refers to everything that does not involve a contradiction and this is referred to again in n. 10, in which Eckhart connects everything possible with anything not involving a contradiction. Therefore absolute power is essentially the capability to do everything that is logically possible. Here, the question of doing everything possible is considered, firstly in connection with being fitting, secondly in the context of foresight and thirdly in the light of another question concerning the will.

It can be noted that the manuscript, (n. 11), includes a duplication of the word, *Deus*. Grammatically the sentence only requires one use and so the extra one is probably a

copyist error. In n. 11, reference is made back to the initial argument of n. 1 in which the power of God was restricted such that God could only do the things that are befitting, *decens*, for him to do. Justice, *iusta*, is included here with *decens*, which, because this is the first mention of justice, could simply be an isolated reference suggesting these are just two among all the predicates that can be attributed to God, however justice is also one of the specifics in the treatment of Thomas:

God has done whatever is actually just, not whatever is just potentially:
since he is able to do that which at present is not just through not being
in existence; yet if it were, what he does would be just.⁵²⁴

The language of Eckhart has modelled that of Thomas, and so being just seems to be carrying the same effect as being fitting. The nature of the *abbreviatio*, and likewise knowledge of the Meister, suggest the use of *iusta* might not simply be accidental or simply to add another possibility or even constraint to the situation, because interestingly, the notion that justice acted as a restriction on God's power was stated by Augustine.⁵²⁵ Referring in n. 11 to justice, not only connects with the treatment of Thomas in his *Q.d. De potentia* but also Augustine and this seems to be intentional of Eckhart in this second half of the text. Augustine was a key source for Lombard who also considered this question when reflecting, probably on Abelard, and the fear of restricting to being only able to do that which he actually does. In *distinction* 43 Lombard moves through a discussion on why God's power should not be seen as limited and that he is able to do more than he does, stating,

God is not able to do anything other than what is good and just, that is
he cannot do anything other than what, if he were to do it, would be just
and good ... He (God) is able to do many things which are neither good
nor just because they neither are nor will be.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1 a. 5, r. 7, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: '*Deus fecit quidquid est iustum in actu, non autem quidquid est iustum in potentia; potest enim aliquid facere quod nunc non est iustum, quia non est: tamen si esset, faceret iustum.*'

⁵²⁵ See Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium Donatistarum Episcopum*, Book 1, 30, 35 (PL 43, 727; CSEL 53, 233), footnote 127.

⁵²⁶ Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 43, c. 2 (187) (1971): '*Non potest Deus facere nisi quod bonum est et iustum, id est non potest facere nisi illud quod, si faceret, bonum esset et iustum,*

Lombard is floating the idea about things being done, that are in fact never done, but if they were, then they would be good and just. Coincidentally this is a response to those who have proposed a limitation and adopted ‘sacred authorities’ to establish the case. Eckhart remains respectful, but is less concerned about agreeing with these sacred authorities. This refusal to limit God’s power then draws in the idea of foreknowledge before calling on Augustine’s *Enchiridion*. As already noted there are parallels between *Question six* and *distinctions* 42 to 44, yet although there are similarities in format, they also show the contrasting ideas proposed. Justice is introduced by Eckhart and not again mentioned directly, whereas Lombard is keen to develop the notion of justice alongside that of God’s will and expands his thoughts on this with further reference to Augustine.⁵²⁷ The ‘if it were to be done’ is not pointing to things that could be done, in contrast with Eckhart, and simply emphasises all that is done by God is just. Justice featured in the power debate after Augustine, notably through Stephan Langton, William of Auxerre, Hugh of St Cher, and then later with Albert who said that God can only do what is good and just.⁵²⁸ Canonist treatments incorporated the debate as Church legislation and structure developed, and Duns Scotus added that God could act outside of existing law through his absolute power but this would still be within the *ordinata*.⁵²⁹ During Eckhart’s times in Paris, the notion of justice was inevitably a factor as there were several rivalries in which either party would be glad to claim victory with divine justification. The notion of *iusta* is not out of place in this question of omnipotence and it could be that slotting it in here, is neither inappropriate nor arbitrary, but it is loaded, in the way it aligns Thomas with Augustine.

Whether this is just mixing in another predicate from what could be many, or if there is a more pointed reason, this is the expression of the filter of right action, or moral possibility. Eckhart, as Thomas had done, considers the filter of an action to be fitting for God by

verum est; sed multa potest facere quae nec bona sunt nec iusta, quia nec sunt nec erunt, nec bene fiunt vel fient, quia nunquam fient.’

⁵²⁷ See Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 42, c. 1-3 (184-6).

⁵²⁸ See Langton, *Der Sentenzenkommentar des Kardinals Stephan Langton*, (ed.) A.M. Landgraf (1952), *distinction* 43, (1952), 60, footnote 184; William, *Summa Aurea*, (ed.) J. Ribailier, 1 (1980), 212, footnote 193; Hugh, *I Sentences*, d. 42, q. 1, footnote 209; Albert, *In I Sentences*, d. 43, art. 6, *sol.*, (ed.) Borgnet, 26: 376, footnote 233.

⁵²⁹ See John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un., footnote 332.

introducing a temporal aspect by using the ‘if it were ... then it would be’ conditional clause. Thomas has said that this is the case for being just and here Eckhart uses this same grammatical tool but with the idea of being fitting. The Meister states firstly, again to emphasise his stance, that *potentia* must be seen as absolute because everything that God does now is not only possible, but befitting, otherwise God would not be doing it. But more than this, God could still do it, even if it were not decent and just at this moment in time, then it would be. According to Grabmann, this position is in ‘sharp contrast’ with Thomas and the general opinion of the period as typified by Henry of Ghent who said,

In God’s work, honest and expedient are the same. So because God cannot do what is not good, he cannot do what is not decent, appropriate or honest. And to put it precisely, he can make nothing which it would be inappropriate or disorderly for him to make. Whatever he makes is appropriate for him to make and whatever he makes and is able to make, if it were appropriate for him to make it, would be made decently and in order.⁵³⁰

The thrust of Henry’s position is that God only actualises what is *decens* even acknowledging the last statement above which is still dependent on the action being *decens*.

Further clarification proceeds immediately, as the Meister justifies saying that God could do something whether it is *decens* or not, by adding that if it were to be done, then it would be *decens*. Like Henry above, this statement could simply be saying, that if God does an action, it is because it is possible and befitting, and nothing else actually exists such that it would not be *decens* for God to do. This would mean there is no difference in the actions God does and the ones he could possibly do but this implies a limitation based on action and the Meister is looking to stretch further into the realm of possibility. This

⁵³⁰ Henry of Ghent, Quodlib. XI, 2: ‘*In Dei opere idem sunt bonum, honestum et expediens. Quare quia Deus nullo modo potest facere quod non est bonum, nullo modo potest facere, quod non sit decens sive decorum sive honestum. Et sic absolute dico, quod Deus nullo modo potest facere aliquid, quod nullo modo et secundum nullem ordinem deceret eum facere. Immo quicquid facit, decet eum facere et quicquid facit et quicquid facere potest, si faceret deceret eum facere et non nisi secundum ordinem decentem faceret.*’ See M. Grabmann, ‘Neuaufgefundene Pariser Quaestionem Meister Eckharts’ (1927), 358; with trans. M. Vinzent, ‘Questions on the Attributes’ (2012), 176-8.

can be seen from Paul's letter to *Titus* saying that, 'to the pure all things are pure'⁵³¹ and in the context of the epistle, the thinking process involves, not cutting across, but necessitating right behaviour and so this could explain rather than excuse God's action. Alternatively, maybe Eckhart was suggesting that whatever action not seems *decens* from a human perspective could still be *decens* from God's perspective, but this would mean right behaviour from God's perspective not being according to his revealed will to creation such that God has one set of rules of behaviour for his creation and another set for himself. As God is prior to creation then this is permissible but questionable from creation's perspective. It was Thomas who suggested God could do things differently in some other order and so this is a possible explanation, although this statement was possibly just Thomas' way of not wishing to be seen to be limiting God. Likewise, in the case of justice for Thomas, whenever God acts it must be justly, because this is how God acts. Yet there is also a fourth explanation, in which Eckhart is about to take his listeners further away from the comfort zone of orthodoxy.

Throughout *Question six* the way in which power is to be considered and the difference between viewing power according to its nature and how it is actualised is explored, and for Eckhart, the whole idea of a power distinction, is only an issue from a human perspective, because God simply acts absolutely. At the head of the question the *potentia ordinata* was the power limited by the action having to be fitting but now the new proposal is that the *potentia absoluta* is the power able to do everything that is not only possible but also befitting. For something to be *decens* is not a limitation for the Meister. Or rather, the Meister does not see this as a limitation on God. This is similar to the notion of Thomas, who as seen earlier, follows and thereby connects his treatment of the plight of the fallen virgin with the question of whether or not God could sin. Outside of the confines of creation it is possible to restore the virgin, because through absolute power God can do everything that is possible including restoring something that is broken now. Eckhart's thinking matches that of Thomas here in that God is able to make something right outside of time that is wrong within time. However, this is where Thomas draws the line between the *absoluta* and the *ordinata*. For Thomas, absolute power is power

⁵³¹ *Titus* 1: 15: 'omnia munda mundis coinquinatis autem'.

according to its principle while directed power relates to its operation⁵³² and so, within creation, God could not do something unbefitting, or unjust, because his nature does not go against his will, but the Meister seems to be proposing here that God should not be seen as being restricted in this way.

Within the text there is no definite explanation of how God makes an action befitting at a different time, although there is the notion that, within time, God can be perceived by man as self-limiting but in the reality of atemporality there is no such limitation. However, Eckhart does not make the temporal distinction and maintains God could do something unbefitting now out of absolute power irrespective of what man thinks. This is a dangerous step to propose that God can actually do things which are not *decens* within the present order but this may well have been in Eckhart's mind, by emphasising the 'now'.

This is not just that, outside of creation, the nature of God is not subject to the will of God and so, if it were in God's nature to act in a way that is wrong within creation, then he could do so outside of creation but this would no longer be wrong, but rather, this is God acting in an unbefitting manner within time and creation. The whole idea of how creation perceives an action as befitting is only relevant to creation.

God's singular *maxime actus* is always befitting because that is the nature of his action and, because it is one action, it is, paradoxically for creation, both temporal and atemporal. This would unquestionably cause a stir among his audience because in this, and in contrast to Thomas and Henry, Eckhart cuts against the orthodox value that God always acts in the expected and accepted manner. The Meister in qualifying this proposal by saying that if God does something, then it is befitting, is elevating God beyond man's understanding and this is not untypically Eckhartian. In *Predigt* 5b,⁵³³ Eckhart speaks of how God made himself poor taking on human nature in Christ,⁵³⁴ and urges his hearers to 'let God be God' as he is in the innermost ground where nature is suspended. Although this is in the context of comparing God's nature with human nature, the same thought applies here

⁵³² Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1 a. 1, resp., (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: '*Potentiam vero attribuimus ratione eius quod permanet et quod est principium eius, non ratione eius quod per operationem completur.*'

⁵³³ See Eckhart, *Pr.* 5b (DW I 85-96).

⁵³⁴ 2Cor. 8: 9: '*scitis enim gratiam Domini nostri Iesu Christi quoniam propter vos egenus factus est cum esset dives ut illius inopia vos divites essetis.*'

such that, when thinking of God, human nature no longer applies and sin exists only within the human context. Eckhart also made the connection between sin and the will of God in his *Book of Divine Consolation*, in a passage that is found similarly in his defence in Cologne. The intention seems to be to urge man to gain the same will as God such that he will not sin but it is also plain that God acts according to his will and, whatever he does, it is not sin.⁵³⁵

This notion, that God has not actualised anything that does not exist, and all possibilities that exist, could possibly be done, and so all that exists is *decens* and all that possibly could be done would also be *decens* is not inconsistent for the Meister in emphasising God as being absolute power with no limitation. In different words Eckhart spoke of how God only became God at the point of creation as the idea of God is relevant only from the context of creation. There is no suggestion from Eckhart that he is connecting *Question six* with *Predigt 52* but his thoughts in the sermon do help to explain this thought of all God's actions being *decens* as he describes the flowing-out from God as well as the breaking-through to God. In what is effectively another way of describing detachment, Eckhart states this process of breaking-through, *durchbruch* although it seems there is no Latin equivalent for this term:

Let God perform what he will, and let man be free. Everything that ever came from God is directed into pure activity ... God is free of all things ... When I flowed out from God ... I acknowledge that I am a creature. But in the breaking-through, when I come to be free of will of myself and of God's will, and of all his works and of God himself, then I am above created things, and I am neither God nor creature, but I am what I was and what I shall remain, now and eternally.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ See Eckhart, *Proc. Col.* I, n. 95...12 (LW V, 282, 15-283,3... 203,4-12) See *Buch der göttlichen Tröstung* (Quint) (DW V 22,5-14).

⁵³⁶ Eckhart, *Pr.* 52 (DW II 495,4-6 ... 497,5 ... 504,5 ... 504,6 – 505,1): 'Und lâze got wûrken, waz er welle, und stâ der mensche ledic. Allez, daz ie von gote gekam, daz ist gesast in ein lûter wûrken ... ist got ledic aller dinge ... Dô ich ûz gote vlôz ... wan alhie bekenne ich mich crêatûre. Mêr: in dem durchbrechen, dâ ich ledic stân mîn selbes willen und des willen gotes und aller sîner werke und gotes selben, sô bin ich ob allen crêatûren und enbin weder got noch crêatûre, mêr: ich bin, daz ich was und daz ich blîben sol nû und iemermê.' Trans. E. College and B. McGinn (1981).

The message of the sermon urges this step of *durchbruch* into freedom because in this state all actions are untainted. This mirrors God who is free and whose actions are pure. The notion of something being appropriate for the omnipotent God to actualise is only an issue within creation. Everything that God does is pure or *decens*. God could not do anything that was wrong for God to do and therefore it is no trouble to remove this filter that restricts what is actualised according to what is befitting for God to do. Rather than the actions of God having to pass through two filters, the Meister is always seeking to present the power of God as the absolute singular, emanating and perfecting *maxime actus*.

The key to this section of n. 11 is found in the Latin *Sermo XXVIII* which contains fragments of text parallel to questions five and six as seen above in the notes on Q6. Eckhart states:

God alone, as first, universal cause makes everything: ‘everything is made through him’, etc. (*John* 1:3). Again, he alone makes everything good, as the universal End of all things. And further, because God makes something he makes it good, and it is good. See [the homily on *James* 1:17] ‘(All) best gifts’. Further, however, only the final End which is also the first End itself makes something good, both because only that one is properly the End, and because anything that is in whatever way conceived as being not directed [towards this End] is not a good in itself, and things are good in themselves only if they are in whatever way redirected [towards it] again.⁵³⁷

Again Eckhart explains the actions of God such that our perception of what is good is addressed. When something is ordained or directed by God then it is also redirected

⁵³⁷ Eckhart, *Sermo XXVIII/2* n. 289-90 (LW IV 259,8-15): ‘(Item) solus deus “omnia” facit, utpote causa prima universalis, Ioh. 1: “omnia per ipsum facta sunt” etc. Item solus “bene” facit, utpote finis universalis omnium. Et iterum, quia hoc ipso quod aliquid facit deus, “bene” facit et bonum est. Vide super [“Omne” datum optimum]. Rursus autem solus finis ultimus sive etiam primus ipsum facit bonum, tum quia ille solus proprie est finis, quia finis [qui non est ultimus finis] non est finis, tum quia quocumque posito praeter ordinem in ipsum non est res bona, et quocumque amoto stante ordine in ipsum res sunt bonae.’ For trans. see ‘Questions on the Attributes’ (2012), 179-82, and notes on the homily on *Jas* 1:17 referred to in the passage and issues on translation.

towards God and so it is good because all that God does is good. As Markus Vinzent explains, ‘God doing everything good does not mean that everything he makes is good now, because what something is now is not its real essence. Conversely, what is indecent now is not indecent by its nature, but if it is directed towards the good end it becomes good and just.’⁵³⁸ Being *decens* ‘now’ then involves a temporal aspect and acknowledgement what *is* within time as we perceive it.

As far as being *decens* is concerned this does not affect the ‘everything possible’ for Eckhart and this is clarified, secondly, in n. 12 with another temporal aspect, foresight, being introduced in a way that is consequential to the notion of *decens* not being a limitation on God. The previous statement by incorporating time implied, or at least questioned, whether God could do something that he had not previously been able to do, or rather thought not able to do, with consideration of how God acts within time, and in particular the problem raised if God is able to do something he was not able to do before. The natural response to this problem of everything being *decens*, is to question if God is limited to only do the things he already knows about, which suggests there could be something unknown by the ‘omniscient’ God. By using this style of argument, Eckhart is probably showing, as with the implication of *decens*, the idea of foresight is only of concern within creation. If the previous paragraph questioned whether being *decens* is a restriction on God’s power then this paragraph questions whether God’s *previdit* is a restriction.

Comprehending how God is both transcendent and immanent, and acts outside of temporality and yet, as far as we are concerned, within it, had always been relevant to the question of a power distinction. Eckhart could well be referring back to Augustine again, who, as seen in chapter one, was a major contributor to the issue of reconciling God’s sovereign power with the man’s freedom of choice. Augustine stated how man cannot resist the will of almighty God, otherwise God would not be omnipotent.⁵³⁹

Moving through what became classic cases for the power debate, such as that of the possible raising of Judas, the apparent limitation of waiting for Lot, the problem of evil and necessity for Christ’s suffering on the cross, Augustine demonstrated that God chooses to allow certain actions that might appear questionable, but are in fact within his

⁵³⁸ M. Vinzent, ‘Questions on the Attributes’ (2012), 178.

⁵³⁹ See Augustine, *Sermo de symbolo ad catechumenos* 2 (CChr.SL 46, 185-6, PL 40, 627), footnote 120.

permissive will. God possesses absolute power but with a self-imposed limitation that he will only actually do whatever he chooses to do. God's will is his choice based on his own nature such that actions permitted are always good and just etc. even if that is not apparent from a human perspective. There is enough power to do other things but this remains unused. This way God remains omnipotent, but from man's perspective, there is also the essential thoughtful, decision-making, freedom of choice and it is this strong connection between omnipotence and the will that is picked up by Eckhart. N. 9 has already considered the ordering of power with regards to the will and knowledge and the three are held in tension again here with particular focus on the will being a matter of choice effecting any action. The proposal of n. 11, that God acts absolutely in a way that is befitting leads to the next 'but' of n. 12. The '*non*' combined with '*nisi*' when translated into English brings an 'only' into the text and, as before in n. 9, this is a trigger for Eckhart to explain his own view, this time that foresight, or foreknowledge, is not a limitation from a divine perspective. Indeed the Meister then picks up this 'only' to present a similar idea to the one floated by n. 9 when stating here that if God 'only' does the things he has foreseen then this proposition is true. Power cannot be fully understood by only considering the works it performs and likewise there is a perceived limitation to power if only considering what God has foreseen.

Eckhart explains that it is critical how the 'if' is understood. When the 'if' refers to what has been actualised, then the proposition is true that God sees, knows, and actualises only the same things which are done. Alternatively if this 'if' is referring to the power needed to do anything whether within time or not, then God must have enough power to do it or he would not be omnipotent and the proposition is false. In this context, God's power is infinite but in reference to things done, God only actualises something he has foreseen. The strand of thought running through *Question six* demands that power should not be thought of as limited, and so God has power to do whatever is possible whether it has been foreseen or not. The logic when dealing with an action, is that God as omniscient must know beforehand what he is going to do, and likewise, must have seen what he knows and so God only actualises what he has foreseen.

Once again the Meister is following Thomas in dealing with the notion that God could only do what he has foreseen:

When you say that God is not able to do except what he has foreseen that he would do, the statement admits of a twofold construction: because the negative may refer either to the power signified in the word

able, or to the act signified in the word do. In the former case the statement is false: since God is able to do other things besides those that he foresees he will do, and it is in this sense that the objection runs. In the latter case the statement is true, the sense being that it is impossible for God to do anything that was not foreknown by him. In this sense the statement is not to the point.⁵⁴⁰

Aquinas breaks down the issue of foresight into whether or not the action is being considered in terms of the power required to do it or the ability to do action. As Thomas alludes, considering the foresight of an act itself does not deal with the question of whether God can do other than he does. The phrasing of the argument is different between the two meisters but the concepts and conclusions are effectively the same. Eckhart has considered two ‘ifs’ and Thomas designates the two conditions as being related to either the power by which God is able or the act signified by the ‘do’ although these ideas are in reverse order. Eckhart’s first ‘if’ deals with the things God actually does and therefore, as with Thomas’ ‘do’ it is impossible for God to do something he does not know about and thereby foreseen. In this case God ‘only’ does these things. Thomas adds that this statement is effectively irrelevant and maybe Eckhart thought likewise, but these are ‘only’ Prosper’s abbreviated notes. The second ‘if’ of Eckhart deals with whatever God could do, matching the ‘able’ of Thomas and so in both cases there is no limitation as this is a question concerning power. When considering power in its essence, neither meister wishes to suggest any limitation. In following Thomas, Eckhart has also followed Lombard who had also suggested the problem was caused by those wishing to limit God’s power by using terms that could be taken ambiguously.⁵⁴¹

Eckhart has shown in nn. 11 and 12 how being fitting for God, and what God foresees, or his omniscience, have no effect on his omnipotence and in n. 13, the will is revisited as

⁵⁴⁰ Thom. Aqu., *Q.d. De potentia*, q. 1 a. 5, r. 7, (ed.) Marietti (1965), 23a: ‘*quod haec locutio, Deus non potest facere nisi quod praescit se facturum, est duplex: quia exceptio potest referri ad potentiam quae importatur per ly potest, vel ad actum, qui importatur per ly facere. Si primo modo, tunc locutio est falsa. Plura enim potest facere quam praesciat se facturum; et in hoc sensu ratio procedebat. Si autem secundo modo, sic locutio est vera; et est sensus, quod non potest esse quod aliquid fiat a Deo, et non sit a Deo praescitum. Sed hic sensus non est ad propositum.*’

⁵⁴¹ See Lombard, *I Sent.* d. 43, c. 5 (1971).

another, and final ‘but’ is introduced, this time calling on Augustine whose *Enchiridion* is quoted to consider how God’s will is a constraint on his action. By introducing this notion of Augustine with another ‘but’, it is fairly apparent where the Meister is going with this. After announcing in n. 6 that this treatment needed to consider not just that power is in God, but also the issue of a power distinction, the will of God, as a constraint on power, becomes a recurring theme.

Augustine’s notion of omnipotence, coined by the phrase, ‘*potuit sed non noluit*’, is presented here by the proposal that God cannot do everything, and that he only actually does everything he wills. This proposal of n. 13, headed by the ‘but’, reflects that of Thomas taken in his *Q.d. De potentia*, who also brought this quote from *Enchiridion*:

Nor can we doubt that God does well even in the permission of what is evil. For he permits it only in the justice of his judgment. And surely all that is just is good. Although, therefore, evil, in so far as it is evil, is not a good; yet the fact that evil as well as good exists, is a good. For if it were not a good that evil should exist, its existence would not be permitted by the omnipotent Good, who without doubt can as easily refuse to permit what He does not wish, as bring about what He does wish. And if we do not believe this, the very first sentence of our creed is endangered, wherein we profess to believe in God the Father Almighty. For he is not truly called Almighty if he cannot do whatsoever He pleases, or if the power of His almighty will is hindered by the will of any creature whatsoever.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴² Augustine, *Enchiridion*, c. xxiv, n. 96, trans. J.F. Shaw. From NPNF, First Series, vol. 3, (ed.) P. Schaff (1887), ch. 96: ‘*Nec dubitandum est Deum facere bene etiam sinendo fieri quaecumque fiunt male. Non enim hoc nisi iusto iudicio sinit, et profecto bonum est omne quod iustum est. Quamvis ergo ea quae mala sunt, in quantum mala sunt non sint bona tamen ut non sola bona sed etiam sint et mala, bonum est. Nam nisi esset hoc bonum, ut essent et mala, nullo modo esse sinerentur ab omnipotente bono, cui procul dubio quam facile est quod vult facere, tam facile est quod non vult esse non sinere. Hoc nisi credimus, periclitatur ipsum nostrae confessionis initium, qua nos in Deum Patrem omnipotentem credere confitemur. Neque enim ob aliud veraciter vocatur omnipotens nisi quoniam quidquid vult potest, nec voluntate cuiuspiam creaturae voluntatis omnipotentis impeditur effectus.*’

As seen in chapter one, Augustine was a key figure in developing the notion that God is rightly called Almighty, and professed as almighty. This text explains how this all-mightiness means that God is able to do whatsoever he pleases and is not limited by the will of any creature. However, it is just as clear that anything that has happened, has only done so because God has permitted it. Everything that happens must be within the permissive will of God. This is not an early suggestion of the notion that God can make something befitting that is not befitting now because God is not actively doing anything evil. Neither is evil becoming good. The emphasis of Augustine is that whatever God permits is in a sense good because it has passed through the filter of God's will. Without presenting any criteria, God is perceived to be making a decision on whether or not an action is done based on choice. Likewise Lombard had pointed to Augustine in order to show that 'all things' includes the evil things that God could never will to do, and God should not be denied doing anything that is fitting, *convenit*, for him to do.⁵⁴³ The things that are befitting for God to do, he does and he has the will and power to do them, but if something is not befitting, then God would not be able to do them because he would not be willing. It is noted in the critical apparatus that the clause attributed to Augustine should not include '*non quia potest omnia*' as this has been found neither in Augustine nor Thomas.

It is just Eckhart who incorporates this to the quote from Augustine, and by doing so he presents the distinction proposed in this paragraph. Thomas points out that Augustine emphasised God can do whatever he wills and Eckhart adds the sense that this is not the same as doing everything possible, which is the point followed up in n. 14. As shown it is a typically Augustinian proposal that God does what he wills, but only what he wills, and so it is not too unreasonable for Eckhart to make this addition. The notion that God's omnipotence relates to being able to do everything possible, rather than everything, has just been pointed out in n. 10, and so this paragraph is highlighting the contrast between himself and Augustine who emphasised the will of God as a constraint on what God actually does. By making the connection between doing good, and the will, there is a difference presented between God doing everything that it is possible to do and doing everything that is right for him to do, or in other words, that he chooses to do. At the time of Augustine the power debate had not yet embraced the terms *absoluta* and *ordinata*, but with these later ideas available, this seems like the notion of *ordinata* being a subset of

⁵⁴³ See Lombard, I *Sent.*, d. 42, c. 3, 3 (1971), 296,21-4.

the *absoluta* based on being possible and befitting or logically and morally possible. Hence the '*potuit sed non noluit*', confirms God does less than he possibly could do and this was the basic starting point for Damian, and others moving through the scholastic period when power was considered mostly in relation to action.

This apparent limitation on God's power is explained in the closing sentences of the text when Eckhart shows how this view of Augustine affects how both omnivolence and omnipotence should be considered. Eckhart shows common ground in that Augustine was proposing that God should not be considered as omnivolent because God cannot will everything although the two understand this term differently. For Eckhart the only filter is that of logical possibility and so the only restriction in terms of the will is that God does not will something that could not possibly happen. Eckhart simply adds in the closing paragraph how Augustine was referring to everything as including the things God is not able to do because they are evil deeds. 'Everything' here is the same as what has been termed by other treatments as 'everything possible' and everything God wills is a subset of this everything. The first filter, namely that of the principle of contradiction, is assumed because this is concerning God's action rather than essence. For the Meister, it is as if, according to Augustine, God does not possess the power to do the things that would be evil. Augustine then is also incorporating the second filter of moral choice such that everything that is actualised by God is only done so because God chooses to do only what is right for him to do. Lombard refers to an example quoted by Augustine:

The will of the almighty is able to do many things which it neither wills nor does. For it could have caused twelve legions of angels to fight against those who seized Christ.⁵⁴⁴

This speaks of the will being able, rather than a defect of power but again in the context that God could do more than he does but chooses not to. Whether God is able to do something is a question of choice, not power. As already shown, it was the philosophical introduction, as seen in this *Question six* with Eckhart's reference to Avicenna, that moulded later 13th century theology. The idea that God could do more than he ordains was proposed by Albert who accepted that God only acts according to his nature but there is the idea that out of absolute power God could have foreseen another manner and

⁵⁴⁴ Lombard, I *Sent.* d. 43, c. 9 (1971): '*Augustinus etiam in Enchiridion [c. 95] ait: "Omnipotentis voluntas multa potest facere, quae nec vult nec facit. Potuit enim facere ut duodecim legiones Angelorum pugnarent contra illos qui Christum ceperunt"*'.

therefore could have done things differently.⁵⁴⁵ Albert presented the notion of absolute power that was greater than power that is operated and likewise Thomas, as seen earlier, proposed God could do more out of his absolute power than he has foreseen and pre-ordained, although he does not, and the proposal was not without the statement that nothing is actualised if it has not been foreseen or pre-ordained.⁵⁴⁶ This is the last word though, and so the matter has not rested with Albert or Thomas but with Augustine. Eckhart's treatment, or at least the *abbreviatio* of his treatment, ends at this point with no sense of climax.

Summary

Ensuring that a summary of the content of *Question six* is an accurate account of Eckhart is difficult because the text we have is already only an *abbreviatio*. This is not therefore Eckhart directly, and yet there is no reason to imagine there is any wastage or deviation and, as noted, every statement is relevant and supportive of the thinking being presented. Likewise, this thoughtfulness within the text is reflected not just in the content, but also because the structure bears similarity with Lombard's *distinctions* and Thomas' treatment of the omnipotence of God. The question is only a small piece of text expressing Eckhart's notion of omnipotence and yet, because of the consistency of his thinking, by applying other texts, both Latin and Middle High German, the Meister's overall idea is effectively amplified. Both, what are perceived as, scholarly or mystical works develop the text of *Question six* enabling a richer understanding. More than just a question of omnipotence, there are several definite points the Meister seemingly wishes to make over and above the thoughts he expresses in direct response to the question. Eckhart pays respect to historical treatments and uses the opportunity provided by this question to record something of the notions fundamental to his own theology. In this treatment, as well as making reference to key theological scholarship, Eckhart demonstrates that he believed Greek and Arabic philosophical tools could be embraced to develop and explain this revelation of the nature of God.

The text begins with Eckhart asking whether omnipotence in God should be regarded as absolute, or directed towards action. He then lays down the proposal that power should

⁵⁴⁵ Albert, *In III Sent.*, d. 20B, art.3, (ed.) Borgnet, 28: 358-9, footnote 238.

⁵⁴⁶ See Thom. Aqu., *S.Th.* I, q. 25, a. 5, (ed.) Leon. XIII (1888), 297, footnote, 250.

be related to the things God is able to do because they are both possible and befitting. The counter proposal states that this would impose a limitation on God's power, which needs to be considered rather as absolute because God can do everything that is possible.

Eckhart deals with this theological question with a philosophical idea that power can be considered in essence itself or as being related to the actions it is able realise. This proposal and counter proposal present that, for God to act simply based on the logical possibility, *i.e.* that a thing could happen, would point to absolute power. Alternatively, God only does the things that are befitting for him to do and so the power to do these should be considered as directed. This idea that there are two thresholds of possibility which can be termed as logical and moral are central throughout this treatment.

Eckhart states there are two aspects to this question in that it is both an issue about how the power of God should be understood and also a question of how this apparent distinction should be understood. These two thoughts are obviously connected, and Eckhart presents that how power is understood effects how the distinction should be considered and so firstly he shows that God possesses the power being described. By framing power in terms of potentiality and actuality, the ideas of active and passive actuality and also intrinsic and extrinsic action are introduced. Power then can be seen in God both as the potential to do any possible action and also as the power that is actualised. This is power, both in God in himself, and in all his action. God's power in action is indistinct from God. The contrast is made between the nature of God's power with man's power to show that God is total power, and more than that, God is a singular, continuous, emanating act of power, action of the highest degree.

This explanation is critical because, having said that power is considered in two ways, in practice there is only one act of power. With there being no need to distinguish within the nature of God's power Eckhart returns to *Question six* to consider how *potentia* has been considered previously as both *absoluta* and *ordinata*. And for his answer, Eckhart points to whether the focus is on God's power or the way in which God directs this power with the proposal God's omnipotence should be considered as absolute because otherwise it would be limited. The closing stages of text follow a pattern of argument and counter argument to show why God's power should not be thought of as limited. Firstly, God's power would be restricted if any action of God was subject to his will. This issue can be dealt with by considering God's will as intrinsic to his being and therefore relates with, but is not primary to, God as power. God could only will to do the things that are logically possible and these are also therefore within his knowledge and power. God's existence is

not distinct from his action, but is his action. The will is also considered as a matter of choice based on what is befitting, or morally right, for God to do and in this sense is subject to other factors and so cannot be predicated in the same way as knowledge and power. The Meister shows how earlier treatments, including that of Thomas, apply God's will as a second filter, meaning God actualises less than is possible based on power alone. Secondly, to restrict God to only doing what he foresees is shown to depend on whether power is considered in itself or in relation to action. Finally Augustine is not just, notionally as earlier, but literally brought into the argument for seeming to limit the power of God according to his will. Eckhart explains that Augustine included evil things as possible and so to rule out the thought of God doing evil, God only does the things he chooses to do.

The conclusion running through the text, is that Eckhart always looks to point to the absolute power of God as actually being absolute, and any of these factors that have been considered by others to restrict the power of God, should be regarded as focussing on power as it is directed towards action. For Eckhart, God's directed power is just the emanation of absolute power. More than that, God is able to do all that is logically possible and whether or not it is morally possible should not be taken as a restriction. Again this is a feature of the Meister, to draw a line between himself and earlier treatments including those by such as Augustine, who spoke into the notion of how God acts, long before the 'power distinction' was formulated. Earlier treatments incorporated into *Question six* provided Eckhart with an academic opportunity for comparison with others, but importantly emphasise how his own notion of the omnipotence of God, as this explosion of absolute power, is both radical yet consistent within his own philosophical theology.

For Eckhart, there is no question of God not acting absolutely, but this is expressed here in an ongoing debate about the notion of a power distinction. The Meister is persistently aiming to take his audience into God's perspective from which there is no distinction, even if the filters that seem to limit God's power are real from a human perspective. Restricting God according to choice based on logical or moral possibility is not decision-making from a divine view, likewise breaking down actuality into active or passive potentiality, or considering God's intrinsic and extrinsic activity do not limit God, but reflect human limitations in comprehending God.

There is a truth in the statement that it is not us who measure God, but God who measures us and so the concept of omnipotence for Eckhart should always point to the God of active

power beyond any human comprehension. God's absolute power is not some 'thing', let alone something that could be measured. God' is one action, the *maxime actus* a continuous actualisation of himself. McGinn summarises Eckhart's methodology stating:

The task of theology for Eckhart was not so much to reveal a set of truths about God as it was to frame the appropriate paradoxes that would serve to highlight the inherent limitations of our minds and to mark off in some way the boundaries of the unknown territory where God dwells.⁵⁴⁷

In this text Eckhart shows that any boundaries exist only in our thinking, by presenting God as measureless and without boundary. The question of a power distinction asked by Damian was about the measuring of God and Eckhart has blown the question away through a revelation of how we should understand God's power. This is neither the first nor the last treatment of the so-called power distinction, but it holds substantially as a clear reflection of Eckhart's thinking, and as such must be considered as a significant, as well as militant contribution.

Question six is Meister Eckhart's treatment of the omnipotence of God and the, historically considered, perceived power distinction typifies his thinking in seeking to show God is not restricted to our understanding of God. Rather than what we see and know, the focus is switched to whatever is possible, because our notion of omnipotence should point to God as the 'everything possible' ... absolute power in essence and action.

⁵⁴⁷ McGinn, *Essentials*, (1981), 31.

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Appendix

i. Abbreviations

Jewish scriptures

Gen.	Genesis
Exod.	Exodus
Deut.	Deuteronomy
1Sam.	1 Samuel
1Kgs.	1 Kings
1Chr.	1 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Job	Job
Ps(s).	Psalms
Prov.	Proverbs
Eccl.	Ecclesiastes
Isa.	Isaiah
Jer.	Jeremiah
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Dan.	Daniel
Amos	Amos
Mic.	Micah
Zech.	Zechariah
Mal.	Malachi
Jdt.	Judith
1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees

Sir.	Sirach/ Ecclesiasticus
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Rom.	Romans
1Cor.	1Corinthians
2Cor.	2Corinthians
Phil.	Philippians
Col.	Colossians
1Tim.	1Timothy
2Tim.	2Timothy
Titus	Titus
Heb.	Hebrews
Jas.	James
1Pet.	1Peter
1John	1John
Rev.	Revelation

Eckhart

In Eccl.	Sermones et Lectiones super Ecclesiastici
In Ex.	Expositio libri Exodi
In Gen. I	Expositio libri Genesis
In Gen. II	Liber parabolarum Genesis
In Ioh.	Expositio sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem

In Sap.	Expositio libri Sapientiae
Pr.	Predigt + Arabic numeral (German sermon)
Proc. Col. I	Processus Coloniensis I
Prolog. gen. in Opus tripartitum	Prologus generalis in Opus tripartitum
Prolog. in Opus propositionum	Prologus in Opus propositionum
Quaest. Par. I	Quaestio Parisiensis I
Quaest. Par. IV	Quaestio Parisiensis IV
Quaest. Par. V	Quaestio Parisiensis V
Quaest. Par. VI	Quaestio Parisiensis VI
Quaest. Par. VII	Quaestio Parisiensis VII
Quaest. Par. VIII	Quaestio Parisiensis VIII
Sermo	Sermo + Roman numeral (Latin sermon)
VAb	Von abegescheidenheit

Books / Journals

ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers, The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325.
AV	Authorised Version (KJB)
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCEL	Christian Classics Ethereal Library
CChr.SL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CUP	Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis
De Veritate	Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate
FKDG	Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
KJB	King James Bible
Med. Ren. Stud.	Medieval and Renaissance Studies
Metaph.	Metaphysics
NASB	New American Standard Bible

NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
PG	Migne, Jacques Paul, Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca.
Phys.	Physics
PL	Migne, Jacques Paul, Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina.
Q.d. De potentia	Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
S.c.G.	Summa contra Gentiles
S. Th.	Summa theologiae
Scriptum Sent.	Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum
ThDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament

Other abbreviations

a. or art.	articulus
a.c.	ante correctionem
a.m.	alia manu
ad.	adversus
add.	addidit
cap. or c.	capitulum / chapter
cit.	cited
col.	column
conj.	conjugate
ed.(s)	editor(s)
eras.	erasit
fol.	folio
in marg.	in margine
in ras.	in rasura

inq.	inquire
intro.	introduction
m.	membrum
n or par	paragraph
op. cit,	opere citato / In the work cited
p.c.	post correctionem
praem.:	praemisit
q(q)	quaestio (s) / question (s)
repr	reproduced / reprinted
resp.	responsum
sol.	solutio
sup.l.	super lineam
s.v.	sub verbo
tr.	tractus / tractate
trans.	translated by
un.	unica (only)

ii. Latin texts cited in a footnote.

¹³⁹ Peter Damian, *Disputatio* (PL 145, 597AB; SC 191, 388-90): ‘*Si nihil, inquam, potest Deus eorum quae non vult: nihil autem, nisi quod vult, facit; ergo nihil omnino potest facere eorum quae non facit. Consequens est itaque, ut libere fateamur, Deum hodie idcirco non plueri, quia non potest; idcirco languidos non erigere, quia non potest; ideo non occidit iniustos; ideo non ex eorum oppressionibus liberat sanctos. Haec et alia multa idcirco Deus non facit, quia non vult, et quia non vult, non potest. Sequitur ergo ut quicquid Deus non facit, facere omnino non possit. Quod profecto tam videtur absurdum tamque ridiculum ut non modo omnipotenti Deo nequeat assertion ista congruere, sed ne fragile quidem homini valeat convenire. Multa siquidem sunt quae nos non facimus, et tamen facere.*’ possumus... *Si quid igitur tale divinis paginis reperitur insertum, non mox passim procaci ac praesumptiva vulgari debet audacia, sed sub modesta sobrii sermonis proferendum est disciplina; quia si hoc diffundatur in vulgus, ut Deus in aliquot, quod dici nefas est, impotens asseratur, illico plebs indocta confunditur, et Christiana fides non sine magno animarum discrimine perturbatur.*

¹⁴¹ Peter Damian, *Disputatio*, (PL 145, 598D-599A; SC 191, 396): ‘*Hoc ergo quod dicitur Deus non posse malum aliquod vel nescire, non referendum est ad ignorantiam vel impossibilitatem, sed ad voluntatis perpetuae rectitudinem.*’

¹⁴⁵ Peter Damian, *Disputatio* (PL 145, 601C-620C; SC 191, 448): ‘*Ad adfirmandum namque quod Deus nequeat virginem reparare post lapsum, quasi consequenter adiciunt: numquid enim potest Deus agree ut quod factum est factum non fuerit? Tamquam si semel constet ut fuerit virgo corrupta, iam nequeat fieri ut rursus sit integra.*’ Ibid., 474-6: ‘*sed sicut ipse semper est quod est, ita sibi quicquid adest semper adest. Quapropter, sicut possumus rite dicere: potuit Deus ut Roma, antequam facta fuisset, facta non fuerit, ita nichilominus possumus et congrue dicere: potest Deus ut Roma, et postquam facta est, facta non fuerit.*’

¹⁴⁸ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* II, (Opera Omnia II, 100): ‘*Non enim haec est dicenda necessitas, sed gratia, quia nullo cogente illam suscepit aut servat sed gratis. Nam si quod hodie sponte promittis te cras daturum, eadem cras voluntate das, quamvis necesse*

sit te cras reddere promissum, si potes, aut mentiri, non tamen minus tibi debet ille pro impenso beneficio cui das, quam si non promisisses, quoniam te debitorem ante tempus dationis illi facere non es cunctatus. Tale est, cum quis sanctae conversationis sponte voyet propositum. Quamvis namque servare illud ex necessitate post votum debeat, ne apostatae damnationem incurrat, et licet cogi possit servare, si nolit, si tamen non invitus servat quod vovit, non minus sed magis gratus est Deo, quam si non vovisset; quoniam non solum communem vitam, sed etiam eius licentiam sibi propter Deum abnegavit, nec sancte vivere dicendus est necessitate, sed eadem qua vovit libertate. Quare multo magis si Deus facit bonum homini quod incepit, licet non deceat eum a bono incepto deficere, totum gratiae debemus imputare, quia hoc propter nos, non propter se nullius egens incepit. Non enim illum latuit, quid homo facturus erat, cum illum fecit, et tamen bonitate sua illum creando sponte se, ut perficeret inceptum bonum, quasi obligavit. Denique Deus nihil facit necessitate, quia nullo modo cogitur aut prohibetur facere aliquid, et cum dicimus Deum aliquid facere quasi necessitate vitandi inhonestatum quam utique non timet, potius intelligendum est, quia hoc facit necessitate servandae honestatis. Quae scilicet necessitas non est aliud quam immutabilitas honestatis eius, quam a se ipso et non ab alio habet, et idcirco improprie dicitur necessitas. Dicamus tamen, quia necesse est, ut bonitas Dei propter immutabilitatem suam perficiat de homine quod incepit, quamvis totum sit gratia bonum quod facit.'

¹⁵¹ Peter Abelard, *Ad Theologiam 'scholarium'* III, c. 5 (PL 178, 1103; CCCM 13, 526): *'Qui etiam sicut Omnia semper scit quae aliquando scit, vel semper vult quae aliquando vult, nec umquam aliquam scientiam amittit vel voluntatem mutat quam umquam habuit, ita omnia semper potest quae aliquando potest, ne umquam aliqua sua potentia privatur.'*

¹⁵⁵ Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis*, I, 2, 22 (PL 176, 215): *'Constat enim quod omne quod sit ab aeterno praevisum est futurum esse; quia ab aeterno futurum est, quod ipsum tamen ab aeterno non est. Et dicimus quod possibile est non fieri quod futurum est. Et si non fieret quod fiet, et non fieri possibile est, numquam futurum fuisset nec praevisum. Quod quia fiet, et futurum semper est et praevisum est. Nulla ergo mutatio hic, aut cassatio providentiae apparet; quia, sicut praevisum est, et fiet: sic si praevisum non esset, non fieret.'* Also, *'Ergo Deus aliud potest facere quam facit, ut tamen ipse aliud faciendo alius non sit. Sed sive idem sive aliud faciat, ipse tamen semper sit idem.'*

¹⁷⁵ Peter Lombard, I Sent., d. 44, c. 2, 4 (306): ‘*Fateamur igitur Deum semper posse et quidquid semel potuit, id est habere omnem illam potentiam quam semel habuit, et illius omnis rei potentiam cuius semel habuit; sed non semper posse facere omne illud quod aliquando potuit facere: potest quidam facere aut fecisse quod aliquando potuit. Similiter quidquid voluit, et vult, id est omnem quam habuit voluntatem, et modo habet; et cuiuscumque rei voluntatem habuit, et moto habet; non tamen vult esse vel fieri omne quod aliquando voluit esse vel fieri, sed vult fuisse vel factum esse.*’

¹⁸¹ Magna Carta, third revision issued 11th February 1225 AD, ‘*In primis concessimus Deo et hac presenti carta nostra confirmavimus pro nobis et heredibus nostris in perpetuum quod anglicana ecclesia libera sit, et habeat omnia jura sua integra et libertates suas illesas. Concessimus etiam omnibus liberis hominibus regni nostri pro nobis et heredibus nostris in perpetuum omnes libertates subscriptas, habendas et tenendas eis et heredibus suis de nobis et heredibus nostris in perpetuum.*’

¹⁸² Stephen Langton in Der Sentenzenkommentar des Kardinals Stephan Langton, in Artur M. Landgraf (ed.), *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*, 37/1, distinction 42 (1952), 58-9: “*Nunc de omnipotentia,*” *Hic queritur, utrum omnia possit Deus*” *responsio: Potest intelligi perfecta et potest intelligi imperfecta. Secundum quod perfecta, falsa est, nisi restringatur universitas, quia non potest hoc demonstrato quodam turpi. Si imperfecta, diverse possunt esse suppletiones. Si suppleatur hoc verbum agere, falsa est; si hoc facere, vera, ita dato secundum quod dicitur, quod mala actio a Deo est. “Set queritur” Non determinat, per cuiusmodi nomen supponatur Deus. Aliud enim est, si dicat: divina essentia potest omnia agere, quia huiusmodi suppletionem ponit magister; et aliud, si dicat: Deus potest omnia agere. Prima falsa est, quia essentie non convenit ambulare. Secunda vera, quia verba convenientia rebus creatis naturaliter, id est naturalia significantia restringunt terminum sibi supponentem, ut supponat pro re, cui conveniat talis actus. Et ideo, si dico: Deus potest ambulare, vera est, quia per predicatum restringitur ad supponendum pro persona, sicut per terminum notionalem.*’

¹⁸⁴ Stephen Langton, Der Sentenzenkommentar des Kardinals Stephan Langton, A.M. Landgraf (ed.), *distinction 43* (1952), 60: “*In Genesi*” *Hoc falsum est, quia ibi non est, ad glosam ibi; oculos vestros conficiat etc.* (The Landgraf footnote at this point refers to

Exod. 26:16) “Set non poterat per iustitiam.” Si intelligas de iustitia Dei falsum est. Quicquid enim potest per potentiam, potest per iustitiam suam. Set tamen propria sit. Ad iustitiam enim Dei non pertinent posse. Unde hanc quidam negant: ex iustitia potest. Set de iustitia Loth ibi loquitur. Tenebatur enim Deus Loth ex pacto, quod fecerunt cum eo angeli.’

¹⁸⁷ Godfrey of Poitiers, *Summa Theologiae*, from MS Avranches, Bibliothèque de la ville, Cod. Lat. 121, fol. 137^r, in A.M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte*, II/2 (1954), 103: ‘Item quaeritur, utrum potuerit ei dare omnium potentiam. Si dicit: non, quare non? Quid impedit potestatem illius, quare hoc non potuit? Si dicit: ita, sed dedit, quicquid potuit: ergo dedit. – Dico, quod de potestate absoluta potuit ei dare. Quis enim auderet de potestate eius et immensitate disputare. Sed non potuit de potentia conditionali, scilicet manentibus decretis, quae ipse constituit. Si enim ei daret potestatem iustificandi et salvandi, sic spes poneretur in homine, cum ‘Maledictus sit qui confidit in homine.’ Sic non revertentur flumina ad locum, unde exierunt, idest homines ad primam causam, a qua processerunt.’

²⁸⁶ Peter of Tarantasia, *Sent I*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 4 In *IV Libros Sententiarum Commentaria*, vol. I (Toulouse, 1652; repr. 1964), 360-1: ‘Respondeo: est ordo simpliciter et est ordo ut nunc. Nihil potest Deus nisi de potentia ordinata, primo modo loquendo de ordine; sed multa potest de potentia circumscripto hoc ordine, scilicet ut nunc. Primo modo dicitur posse de potentia absoluta; secundo modo dicitur posse de potentia ordinata. Ergo multa potest primo modo quae non potest secundo modo. Ideo quaedam dicitur posse de potentia absoluta, quae non potest de ordinata, quia multa subsunt suae potentiae quae non congruit sibi ut nunc facere; posset tamen ea facere convenientia, et sic ea facere.

³⁰¹ John XXI, Letter to the Bishop of Paris, ‘*Episcopo Parisiensi. Relatio nimis implacida nostrum nuper turbavit auditum, amaricavit et animum, quod Parisiis, ubi fons vivus sapientie salutaris abundanter hucusque scaturiit, suos rivos limpidissimos, fidem patefacientes catholicam usque ad terminos orbis terrae diffundens, quidam errores in preiudicium eiusdem fidei de novo pullulasse dicuntur. Volumus itaque tibi auctoritate presentium districte precipiendo mandamus, quatinus diligenter facias inspici, vel inquire a quibus personis et in quibus locis errores huiusmodi dicti sunt sive scripti, et que didiceris sive inveneris, conscripta fideliter, nobis per tuum nuntium*

transmittere quam citius non omittas.' - Dat. Viterbii, xv kalendas februarii, anno primo (Cad 92, 51), 6.

³¹¹ Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibeta* VIII, q. 3 (Paris, 1518), fol. 304^v: '*quod aliquid dicitur impossibile fieri dupliciter. Uno modo obiective tanquam illud quod habet ab alio fieri ... Hoc modo quod impossibile est fieri nullum agens potest facere ... Tale impossibile fieri nec Deus potest facere non propter defectum alicuius potentiae, sed quia ad tale non ordinatur aliqua activa potentia. Alio autem modo dicitur aliquid impossibile fieri subiective ... Ponere impossibile primo modo simpliciter implicat contradictionem et repugnat factioni secundum omnem cursum et ordinem rerum ... Impossibile vero secundo modo, etsi esset impossibile fieri respectu alicuius agentis et secundum aliquem ordinem et cursum rerum, non tamen secundum omnem, ut cum aliquid dicitur fieri ex nihilo quid solum possibile est facere agentem supernaturaliter. Impossibile modo tertio est ubi est aliqua potentia in subiecto reducibilis ad actum per agens supernaturale, non autem per agens naturale, ut quod naturaliter caecus fiat videns, aut quod mortuus resurgat. Isto autem secundo et tertio modo impossibile fieri non dicitur impossibile fieri simpliciter, sed solum impossibile primo modo ... ita quod magnum inconueniens est dicere Deum posse aliquid agere secundum quemcunque cursum et ordinem rerum quod secundum se simpliciter impossibile est fieri. Est enim magnum inconueniens dicere de tali impossibili, puta quod contradictoria sunt simul in eodem, quod non est impossibile quia Deus non potest facere hoc, sed quia hoc non potest fieri.*'

³¹⁴ Henry of Ghent, *Bibliothèque Nationale*, Manuscript Latin 3120 fol. 139^{rb}: '*Legislator non potest concedere privilegium aut condere statutum ad quod sequitur in ecclesia subtractio debite reverentie et obedientie inferiorum ad suos superiores aut universaliter destructio ordinis ecclesiastici, quia hoc est magnum inconueniens et contra ius naturale et divinum, contra quod legislator nichil statuere potest aut concedere aut dispensare; puta quod furioso reddendus sit gladius, existente actu in furia, quem deposuit. Si enim legislatori statuenti generaliter quod gladius deponenti reddendus est talis casus occurreret, ipsum legis director excipiendum a statuto generali iudicaret secundum veridicam doctrinam philosophie, V Ethicorum, (Nicomachean Ethics V, 1137b. Text not yet available in the *Aristoteles Latinus* edition).*

³¹⁵ Henry of Ghent, Bibliotheque Nationale, Manuscript Latin 3120 fol. 139^{va}: ‘*Secundum autem modo bene quandoque sequitur inconueniens in statuto vel privilegio existente in se iusto et equo, saltem in casu, verbi gratia, si statueretur quod gladius depositus a furioso redderetur fratri suo sano. Ex hoc enim non inconueniens dictum nisi ex prava dispositione occulta huiusmodi sane, qua gladium sibi redditum vellet tradere furioso ut vel se vel alium occideret.*’

³¹⁷ Henry of Ghent, Bibliotheque Nationale, Manuscript Latin 3120 fol. 139^{va}: ‘*Statutum autem vel privilegium ad quod secundo modo sequitur inconueniens dictum, scilicet subtractio debite reverentie etc., an hoc posset statuere aut concedere legislator, super hoc distinguendum, puto, de potentia absoluta et ordinata.*’, 3120 fol. 139^{vb}: ‘*Dico ergo de legislatore, qui est homo purus potens peccare et malum agere, quod de potentia absoluta bene potest statuere vel privilegium concedere ad quod sequitur secundo modo inconueniens predictum. Et hoc ideo quid in antecedente non statim apparet inconueniens, cuiusmodi, ut puto, est privilegium fratrum secundum eorum intellectum.*’

³¹⁸ Henry of Ghent, Bibliotheque Nationale, Manuscript Latin 3120 fol. 139^{va}: ‘*Statutum ... ordinata. Licet enim circa Deum non contingat distinguere inter potentiam absolutam et ordinatam; Deus enim, eo quod peccare non potest, nichil potest de potentia absoluta nisi illud possit de potentia ordinata. Omnis enim potentia sua quocumque modo vadit in actum ordinata [est].*’

³¹⁹ Henry of Ghent, Bibliotheque Nationale, Manuscript Latin 3120 fol. 140^{ra}: ‘*De hoc enim videtur loqui beatus Bernardus, libro III ad Eugenium Papam, sic inconueniens: Erras, si ut summam ita et solam institutam a Deo existimas tuam apostolicam dignitatem. Non tua potestas sola est a Domino sed et mediocres sunt et inferiores. Idem in eodem. Honor [um] et dignitatum gradus et ordines quibuscumque suos servare positi estis. Nunc autem subtrahuntur abbates episcopis, episcopi archiepiscopis, etc. Bonane species hec? Nimirum si excusari queat opus. Sicut facitando probatis vos habere plenitudinem potestatis, sed iusticie forte non ita. Facitis hoc, quia potestis; sed utrum et debeatis, questio est. Ecce plana distinctio inter potentiam absolutam et ordinatam circa dominum papam. Quando beatus Bernardus aliquid facitando ostendit se habere plenitudinem potestatis, quam appelo potentiam ordinatam.*’

³²⁴ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. unica, n. 3, vol. VI, Vatican edition, 363-9, *‘In omni agente per intellectum et voluntatem, potente conformiter agere legi rectae et tamen non necessario conformiter agere legi rectae, est distinguere potentiam ordinatam a potentia absoluta; et ratio huius est, quia potest agere conformiter illi legi rectae, et tunc secundum potentiam ordinatam (ordinata enim est in quantum est principium exsequendi aliqua conformiter legi rectae), et potest agere praeter illam legem vel contra eam, et in hoc est potentia absoluta, excedens potentiam ordinatam. Et ideo non tantum in Deo, sed in omni agente libere – quipotest agere secundum dictamen legis rectae et praeter talem legem vel contra eam – est distinguere inter potentiam ordinatam et absolutam; ideo dicunt iuristae quod aliquis hoc potest facere de facto, hoc est de potentia sua absoluta, - vel de iure, hoc est de potentia ordinata secundum iura.’*

³²⁷ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. unica: *‘Sed quando in potestate agentis est lex ex rectitudo legis, ita quod non est recta nisi quia statuta, tunc potest aliter agens ex libertate sua ordinare quam lex illa recta dictet; et tamen cum hoc potest ordinata agere, quia potest statuere aliam legem rectam secundum quam agat ordinate. Nec tunc potentia sua absoluta simpliciter excedit potentiam ordinatam, quia esset ordinata secundum aliam legem sicut secundum priorem; tamen excedit potentiam ordinatam praecise secundum priorem legem, contra quam vel praeter quam facit. Ita posset exemplificari de principe et subditis, et lege positiva.’* In *Opera Omnia*, 6: 364-5, II. 20-8.

³²⁸ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un: *‘Unde dico quod multa alia potest agere ordinate; et multa alia posse fieri ordinate, ab illis quae fiunt conformiter illis legibus, non includit contradictionem quando rectitudo huiusmodi legis – secundum quam dicitur quis recte et ordinate agere - est in potestate ipsius agentis. Ideo sicut potest aliter agere, ita potest aliam legem rectam statuere, - quae si statueretur a Deo, recta esset, quia nulla lex est recta nisi quatenus a voluntate divina acceptante est statuta; et tunc potentia eius absoluta ad aliquid, non se extendit ad aliud quam ad illud quod ordinate fieret, si fieret: non quidem fieret ordinate secundum istum ordinem, sed fieret ordinate secundum alium ordinem, quem ordinem ita posset voluntas divina statuere sicut potest agere.’* In *Opera Omnia* 6: 366, II. 8-19.

³³⁰ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un: *‘Advertendum etiam est quod aliquid esse ordinatum et ordinate fieri, hoc contingit dupliciter: Uno modo, ordine universali, - quod*

pertinet ad legem communem, sicut ordinatum est secundum legem communem “omnem finaliter peccatorem esse damnandum” (ut si rex statuatur quod omnis homicida moriatur). Secundo modo, ordine particulari, - secundum hoc iudicium, ad quod non pertinet lex in universali, quia lex est de universalibus causis; de causa autem particulari non est lex, sed iudicium secundum legem, eius quod est contra legem (ut quod iste homicida moriatur).

Dico ergo quod Deus non solum potest agere aliter quam ordinatum est ordine particulari, sed aliter quam ordinatum est ordine universali.’

³³² John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 44, q. un.: ‘*Potentia tamen ordinata non dicitur nisi secundum ordinem legis rectae de aliquo particulari. Quod apparet ex hoc quod possibile est Deum salvare quem non salvat, qui tamen morietur in peccato finaliter et damnabitur, - non autem conceditur ipsum posse salvare. Iudam iam damnatum (nec tamen hoc est impossibile potentia absoluta Dei, quia non includit contradictionem); ergo istud, scilicet “salvare Iudam,” eo modo est impossibile quo modo possibile est salvare istum: ergo istum potest salvare de potentia ordinata (quod verum est), et illum non ... Staret enim cum illa “quod finaliter malus damnabitur” (quae est lex praefixa de damnandis), quia iste adhuc non est finaliter peccator, sed potest esse non peccator (maxime dum est in via), quia potest Deus eum gratia sua praevenire... Non autem staret, cum illa particulari lege, quod Iudam salvaret; Iudam enim potest praescire salvandum de potentia ordinata, sed non isto modo ordinata sed absoluta ab isto modo, et alio modo ordinata secundum aliquem alium ordinem, quia secundum alium ordinem tunc possibilem institui.’* In *Opera Omnia* 6: 366, I. 20-368, I. 14.

³⁵³ Gerard of Saint Victor, Vat. Lat. 1086 fol. 224^v: ‘*Utrum potestas ordinaria sit a Christo vel a papa. Videtur quod a papa. quia est capud. Contra: papa est sponsus Christi. Dicendum quod potestas est duplex, scilicet ordinis et iurisdictionis. tunc dico quod illud quod homo consequitur per istas est a Christo. credo tamen quod sit una potestas habens diversa officia. habens tamen ordinem sacerdotalem potest exire in actum. Sed quantum ad iurisdictionem. requiritur aliud. dicendum. tamen quod utruque Potestas est a Christo. quia fuit data petro et aliis. ut patet super illud “tu es petrus” per glossam expressam. Licet videatur data (or dare) Uni quia per hoc notabat unitatem ecclesiae. (e)t glossa Rabani (Rabanus Manus) super illud missit alias (Etc?) Sed quantum ad limitationem restringendo habet papa et hoc expediens fuit propter bonum*

commune et in causa rationabili. Ad argumentum patet quia Christus est capud principaliter.'

³⁸⁶ Peter Abelard, *Introductio ad Theologiam* III, 5 (PL 178, col. 1103-4; CCCM 13,527): *'Denique, si more hominum dicamus eum etiam aliquid posse uno tempore quod alio non possit, propter hoc videlicet solum quod ei convenit uno tempore id facere quod alio non convenit, nulla in hoc eius impotentia vel potentiae diminutio est intelligenda, cum ad potentiam cuiuslibet minime pertineat quod ei nullatenus convenit ut inde commendari possit, immo econtrario, eius derogaret dignitati.'*

iii. Comparison: Eckhart Q6 vs. Thomas Aquinas

As the commentary section presents, notions of omnipotence reflect both similarities and differences between these two Meisters. Many of the parallels naturally come with the Thomas' *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia* which is a more substantial work than *Question six*. These links have been supplemented by other passages from Thomas which bear close resemblance to the text of the question.

Table 4: Parallel texts.

Meister Eckhart Q6		Thomas Aquinas	
Utrum omnipotentia, que est in Deo, debeat attendi secundum potentiam absolutam vel secundum potentiam ordinatam?	Whether omnipotence which is in God should be considered as absolute power or as directed power?		
n. 1 Et videtur, quod secundum ordinatam, quia debet attendi secundum quod decet Deum facere, et	And it seems it should be considered as directed [power], because it should be related [to the things] that are	Now God is act both pure and primary, wherefore it is most befitting to him to act and communicate his likeness to other	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 1, r:</i> 'Deo autem convenit esse actum purum et primum; unde ipsi convenit maxime agere, et

secundum ea, que potest facere.	fitting for God to do and [the things] it is possible for God to do.	things: and consequently active power is most becoming to him.	suam similitudinem in alias diffundere, et ideo ei maxime convenit potentia activa.'
		To the first, it must be said that it is impossible that God should do something, and that this be unfitting. However, He is able to make it so that something which is unfitting according to one ordination is made fitting according to another ordination.	<i>Scriptum Sent. III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3:</i> 'Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod hoc est impossibile, ut aliquid faciat Deus, et hoc sit inconueniens; sed tamen potest facere ut illud quod modo est inconueniens secundum unum ordinem, secundum alium ordinem fiat conueniens.'
n. 2 Contra: Omnipotentia respicit omnia que non implicant contradictionem, et hec sunt plura quam ordinata.	The counter-argument: Omnipotence comprises everything that does not involve a contradiction, and this is more than [the things] of [just] directed [power].	God's power, considered in itself, extends to all such objects as do not imply a contradiction.	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1. a. 7, r:</i> 'Potentia Dei, quantum est de se, ad omnia illa obiecta se extendit quae contradictionem non implicant.'
n. 3 Hic primo ostenditur, quod potentia est in Deo. Nam	It has to be shown first that [this] power is in God. For, potentiality is	The question before us concerns God's power: the first point of inquiry is whether	<i>Q.d.. De potentia, q. 1, a. 1:</i> 'Et primo quaeritur utrum in Deo sit potentia.'

potentia dicitur in ordine ad actum.	spoken of with regard to actuality.	there is power in God.	
Sed duplex est actus: scilicet primus, qui est forma, que respondet potentie passive, et operari, quod respondet potentia activa. Et hec est in Deo: tum quia, ubi est operatio intrinseca et extrinseca, ibi est potentia. Sed in Deo est operatio intrinseca et extrinseca: tum quia secundum Avicennam potentia primo inventa est in hominibus, quia habent vim vincendi.	But actuality is two-fold: The first actuality, which is the form [of something], relates to passive potentiality and [the second actuality which is] the act [of something], relates to active potentiality, [which is power]. And this is in God: Both because where there is intrinsic or extrinsic action, then there is power [to bring it about]. But in God there is intrinsic and extrinsic action. [Therefore God has power for intrinsic and extrinsic action]. And, because according to Avicenna, power is firstly found in men because they have the strength to overcome.	I answer that to make the point at issue clear we must observe that we speak of power in relation to act. Now act is twofold; the first act which is a form, and the second act which is operation... Wherefore in like manner power is twofold: active power corresponding to that act which is operation—and seemingly it was in this sense that the word ‘power’ was first employed:—and passive power, corresponding to the first act or the form,—to which seemingly the name of power was subsequently given.	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 1, r:</i> ‘ Ad huius quaestionis evidentiam sciendum, quod potentia dicitur ab actu: actus autem est duplex: scilicet primus, qui est forma; et secundus, qui est operatio... Unde et similiter duplex est potentia: una activa cui respondet actus, qui est operatio; et huic primo nomen potentiae videtur fuisse attributum: alia est potentia passiva, cui respondet actus primus, qui est forma, ad quam similiter videtur secundo nomen potentiae devolutum. ’
Sed Deus non potest pati ab	But God cannot suffer [at the hands of] anything,	Now, just as nothing suffers save by reason of a	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 1, r:</i> ‘ Sicut autem nihil

aliquo, ergo maxime actus.	therefore God is active potentiality of the highest degree. [Power in action].	passive power, so nothing acts except by reason of the first act, namely the form.	patitur nisi ratione potentiae passivae, ita nihil agit nisi ratione actus primi, qui est forma.'
		Whence it most fittingly belongs to Him to be an active principle, and in no way whatsoever to be passive. On the other hand, the notion of active principle is consistent with active power. For active power is the principle of acting upon something else; whereas passive power is the principle of being acted upon by something else, as the Philosopher says (Metaph. v, 17). It remains, therefore, that in God there is active power in the highest degree.	<i>S.Th.</i> I, q. 25, a. 1: 'Unde sibi maxime competit esse principium activum, et nullo modo pati. Ratio autem activi principii convenit potentiae activae. Nam potentia activa est principium agendi in aliud, potentia vero passiva est principium patiendi ab alio, ut philosophus dicit, V Metaphys. Relinquitur ergo quod in Deo maxime sit potentia activa.'
n. 4 Sed dices: quomodo ponitur ista potentia in Deo?	But you will then ask, 'How is this power in God to be understood?		
n. 5 Dicendum, quod secundum quod invenitur in creaturis, amota	The answer has to be: as that which is found in creatures as ultimate	For these names express God, so far as our intellects know Him. Now	<i>S.Th.</i> I, q. 13, a. 2, r: Significant enim sic nomina Deum, secundum

<p>imperfectione, ut est ultimum complementi. Item dico, quod ista potentia est una realiter, quia dicitur de omnibus singulariter. Item, essentia est principium emanationum omnium, et ipsa est una. Ergo et cetera.</p>	<p>perfection, once the imperfection is removed [from them]. I say also, in reality there is only one power, because it is said that all things [are done] in a particular [singular] way. Also, [divine] essence is [the] principle [origin] of all emanations, and itself [this essence] is one. Therefore and so forth.</p>	<p>since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows Him as far as creatures represent Him. God prepossesses in Himself all the perfections of creatures, being Himself simply and universally perfect. Hence every creature represents Him, and is like Him so far as it possesses some perfection; yet it represents Him not as something of the same species or genus, but as the excelling principle of whose form the effects fall short, although they derive some kind of likeness thereto, even as the forms of inferior bodies represent the power of the sun. Therefore the aforesaid names signify the divine substance, but in an imperfect manner, even as creatures represent it imperfectly. So ... "Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-</p>	<p>quod intellectus noster cognoscit ipsum. Intellectus autem noster, cum cognoscat Deum ex creaturis, sic cognoscit ipsum, secundum quod creaturae ipsum repraesentant... Deus in se praehabet omnes perfectiones creaturarum, quasi simpliciter et universaliter perfectus. Unde quaelibet creatura intantum eum repraesentat, et est ei similis, inquantum perfectionem aliquam habet, non tamen ita quod repraesentet eum sicut aliquid eiusdem speciei vel generis, sed sicut excellens principium, a cuius forma effectus deficiunt, cuius tamen aliqualem similitudinem effectus consequuntur; sicut formae corporum inferiorum repraesentant virtutem</p>
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		exists in God," and in a more excellent and higher way.	solarem... Sic igitur praedicta nomina divinam substantiam significant, imperfecte tamen, sicut et creaturae imperfecte eam repraesentant. Cum igitur... id quod bonitatem dicimus in creaturis, praeexistit in Deo, et hoc quidem secundum modum altiore.
		We must also observe that our mind strives to describe God as a most perfect being. And seeing that it is unable to get at him save by likening him to his effects, while it fails to find any creature so supremely perfect as to be wholly devoid of imperfection, consequently it endeavours to describe him as possessing the various perfections it discovers in creatures, although each of those perfections is in	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 1, r: 'Sed et sciendum, quod intellectus noster Deum exprimere nititur sicut aliquid perfectissimum. Et quia in ipsum devenire non potest nisi ex effectuum similitudine; neque in creaturis invenit aliquid summe perfectum quod omnino imperfectione careat: ideo ex diversis perfectionibus in creaturis repertis, ipsum nititur designare, quamvis cuilibet</i>

		<p>some way at fault, yet so as to remove, from God whatever imperfection is connected with them.</p>	<p>illarum perfectionum aliquid desit; ita tamen quod quidquid alicui istarum perfectionum imperfectionis adiungitur, totum a Deo amoveatur.</p>
		<p>Another and a better reply is that there is a twofold relation in God. One is real, that namely, by which the persons are mutually distinct, for instance, paternity and filiation; otherwise the divine persons would be distinct not really but logically, as Sabellius maintained. The other kind of relation is logical, and is indicated when we say that the divine operation comes from the divine essence, or that God works by his essence: for prepositions indicate some kind of relationship. This is because when we attribute</p>	<p><i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 1, r:</i> ‘Vel dicendum, et melius, quod in divinis invenitur duplex relatio. Una realis, illa scilicet qua personae ad invicem distinguuntur, ut paternitas et filiatio; alias personae divinae non realiter sed ratione distinguerentur, ut Sabellius dixit. Alia rationis tantum, quae significatur, cum dicitur quod operatio divina est ab essentia divina, vel quod Deus operatur per essentiam suam. Praepositiones enim quasdam habitudines designant. Et hoc ideo contingit,</p>

		to God operation considered as requiring a principle, we attribute to him also the relationship of that which derives its existence from a principle, wherefore such relation is only logical. Now operation involves a principle, whereas essence does not: hence, although the divine essence has no principle, neither really nor logically, yet the divine operation has a principle in our way of thinking.	quia cum attribuitur Deo operatio secundum suam rationem quae requirit aliquod principium, attribuitur etiam ei relatio existentis a principio, unde ista relatio non est nisi rationis tantum. Est autem de ratione operationis habere principium, non de ratione essentiae; unde licet essentia divina non habeat aliquod principium neque re neque ratione, tamen operatio divina habet aliquod principium secundum rationem.'
n. 6 Secundo inquirendum quomodo debeat intelligi ista distinctio, scilicet potentia absoluta et ordinata. Nam quando aliquid attribuitur Deo secundum se, talia pertinent ad potentiam absolutam. Sed	Second, it is to be enquired how this distinction between absolute and directed power should be understood. For when some properties are attributed to God [insofar as he is God], these pertain to absolute power.	When something is ascribed to the power of God, therefore, one must consider whether it is attributed to his power considered in itself, or in its order to his wisdom and foreknowledge and will. If the former, then he is said to be	<i>Scriptum Sent. III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3:</i> 'quando potentiae divinae aliquid ascribitur, utrum attribuatur potentiae secundum se consideratae; tunc enim dicitur posse illud de potentia absoluta: vel attribuat sibi in

quando sibi aliqua attribuuntur secundum comparisonem ad rationem et sapientiam, sic pertinet ad potentiam ordinatam.	But when some properties are attributed with respect to his intellect and wisdom, then these pertain to directed power.	able from his absolute power; if the latter, then he is said to be able from his ordained power.	ordine ad sapientiam et praescientiam et voluntatem ejus: tunc enim dicitur posse illud de potentia ordinata.’
n. 7 Tunc tertio, ad quaestionem dicendum, quod Magister in Sententiis determinat auctoritatibus sanctorum; et videtur dicere quod attenditur secundum utrumque.	Now thirdly, to this question we say what the Master in his Sentences, with the [authoritative] sayings of the saints, determined, and it seems that, according to him, [God’s omnipotence] is to be considered as both. [as absolute and as directed power].		
n. 8 Quidam tamen dicunt, quod ex hoc est omnipotens, quia potest facere quidquid vult per se et a se.	Some others say, however, that he is omnipotent because he can do everything he wills by himself and of himself.	And some said that he is called almighty because he can do whatsoever he wills, and this by nature and essentially; but this regards the way in which he has power.	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 7, r: ‘quia potest quidquid vult; et hoc habet a se et per se; quod pertinet ad modum habendi potentiam.</i>
n. 9 Contra. Hoc solum declarat modum potentie	The counter argument: This only explains how		

	[the way in which] power works.		
n. 10 Dico igitur, quod magis attenditur secundum potentiam absolutam, quia debet attendi secundum quod se potest extendere ad omnia que non implicant contradictionem, quia attenditur in ordine ad possibile. Item: alias potentia Dei esset limitata, si secundum aliqua attenderetur.	Therefore I say it [God's power] is to be considered rather as absolute power because it should be considered insofar as it extends to all things which do not involve a contradiction, because it is considered as referring to everything that is possible. Also, the power of God would otherwise be limited if we considered it as relating to something.	Two things that are in mutual contradiction cannot be in God. Now the absolute and the conditional are in mutual contradiction, since the absolute is that which is considered in itself, while the conditional depends on something else. Therefore we should not place in God an absolute and a conditional power	<i>Q.d. De potentia q. 1, a. 5: 'in Deo duo contradictoria simul esse non possunt. Sed absolutum et regulatum contradictionem implicant; nam absolutum est quod secundum se consideratur; illud vero quod regulatur, ordinem ad aliud habet. Ergo in Deo non debet poni potentia absoluta et regulata.'</i>
		God always works with the whole of his power. But his effect is limited according to the determination of his will and the order of reason.	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 2, r. arg. 13: 'quod Deus semper agit tota sua potentia; sed effectus terminatur secundum imperium voluntatis, et ordinem rationis.'</i>
Item sicut scientia dicitur Dei omnia	Likewise, when we refer to God's		

scientem, quia scit omnia, ita de potentia.	knowledge, we say that God is omniscient because he knows everything [and] it is also the same when referring to power. [He is omnipotent because he is able to do everything].		
Quare autem non dicitur omnia volentem?	Now, why is it not said that God is omnivolent? [wills everything?]	If God is called almighty and all-knowing, why is he not also called all-willing?	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, art. 7, arg. 5:</i> ‘Item quaeritur quare Deus dicitur omnipotens et omnisciens, et non omnivolens.
Responsio: Solum vult illa, ad que applicat suam scientiam vel potentiam.	In response I say that he only wills those things to which he applies his knowledge or power.	in voluntary actions, power and knowledge (as stated in <i>Metaph.</i> ix, 2, 5) are brought into action by the will: wherefore in God power and knowledge are described in universal terms as being without limit, as when we say that God is all-knowing and almighty: whereas the will, seeing that it is the determining force, cannot cover all things, but only those to which it	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 7, r. 5:</i> ‘in his quae aguntur per voluntatem, ut dicitur IX <i>Metaph.</i>, potentia et scientia determinantur ad opus per voluntatem; et ideo scientia et potentia in Deo quasi non determinata universaliter pronuntiantur, ut cum dicitur omnisciens vel omnipotens, sed voluntas quae determinat, non potest esse

		determines power and knowledge: hence God cannot be called all-willing	omnium, sed eorum tantum ad quae potentiam et scientiam determinat; et ideo Deus non potest dici omnivolens
Et nota quod non dicitur omnipotens, quia in eo sit omnis potentia, sed quia potest facere omne possibile.	And notice that he is not said to be omnipotent because in him would be power to do everything, but because he is able to do everything that is possible	It would seem that the reason is because he can simply do all things. For he is called almighty in the same way as he is called omniscient. Now he is called omniscient because he simply knows all things. Therefore he is called almighty because he can simply do all things.	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, art. 7, arg. 4:</i> ‘Et videtur quod dicatur omnipotens quia simpliciter omnia possit. Sicut enim Deus dicitur omnipotens, ita dicitur omnisciens. Sed dicitur omnisciens, quia simpliciter omnia scit. Ergo et omnipotens dicitur, quia simpliciter omnia potest.’
		God always works with the whole of his power. But his effect is limited according to the determination of his will and the order of reason.	<i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 2, resp. 13:</i> ‘quod Deus semper agit tota sua potentia; sed effectus terminatur secundum imperium voluntatis, et ordinem rationis.’
n. 11 Ad argumentum	To this [first] argument it must	To the first, it must be said that it is	<i>Scriptum Sent. III, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3:</i> ‘Ad

<p>dicendum, quod Deus de potentia absoluta potest Deus facere que nunc non sunt decentia. Si essent tamen facta, essent decentia et iusta.</p>	<p>be said that out of [his] absolute power God can do things that are not decent now. But if they were done, then they would be decent and just.</p>	<p>impossible that God should do something, and that this be unfitting. However, He is able to make it so that something which is unfitting according to one ordination is made fitting according to another ordination.</p>	<p>primum ergo dicendum, quod hoc est impossibile, ut aliquid faciat Deus, et hoc sit inconueniens; sed tamen potest facere ut illud quod modo est inconueniens secundum unum ordinem, secundum alium ordinem fiat conueniens;</p>
		<p>God has done whatever is actually just not whatever is just potentially: since he is able to do that which at present is not just through not being in existence; yet if it were, what he does would be just.</p>	<p><i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 5, r. 7:</i> ‘quod Deus fecit quidquid est iustum in actu, non autem quidquid est iustum in potentia; potest enim aliquid facere quod nunc non est iustum, quia non est: tamen si esset, faceret iustum.’</p>
<p>n. 12 Sed dicis: ‘non potest nisi que preuidit?’ Dicendum quod, si referatur ad actum, scilicet ‘nisi’, tunc est vera, quia quidquid facit</p>	<p>But you [may] ask [against this], ‘Can he only do something, if he has foreseen it?’ To this it should be said that, if this ‘if’ refers to the things he has actually</p>	<p>When you say that God is not able to do except what he has foreseen that he would do, the statement admits of a twofold construction: because the</p>	<p><i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, a. 5, r. 1:</i> ‘quod haec locutio, Deus non potest facere nisi quod praescit se facturum, est duplex: quia exceptio potest</p>

<p>previdit. Sed si referatur ad potentiam, tunc est falsa.</p>	<p>done, then this is true. Because he has foreseen anything he has done. [does]. But if this ‘if’ refers to what he is able to do, then it is false.</p>	<p>negative may refer either to the power signified in the word <i>able</i>, or to the act signified in the word <i>do</i>. In the former case the statement is false: since God is able to do other things besides those that he foresees he will do, and it is in this sense that the objection runs. In the latter case the statement is true, the sense being that it is impossible for God to do anything that was not foreknown by him. In this sense the statement is not to the point.</p>	<p>referri ad potentiam quae importatur per ly potest, vel ad actum, qui importatur per ly facere. Si primo modo, tunc locutio est falsa. Plura enim potest facere quam praesciat se facturum; et in hoc sensu ratio procedebat. Si autem secundo modo, sic locutio est vera; et est sensus, quod non potest esse quod aliquid fiat a Deo, et non sit a Deo praescitum. Sed hic sensus non est ad propositum.’</p>
		<p>God cannot do otherwise than what he foresees that he will do.</p>	<p><i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, art. 5, arg. 1: ‘Deus non potest facere nisi quod praescit se facturum’</i></p>
<p>n. 13 Sed dicis: ‘Augustinus in Enchiridio dicit, quod est omnipotens, quia “potest quidquid vult”, non quia potest omnia.’</p>	<p>But you [may] say [against this] that Augustine in ‘Enchiridion’ states that, ‘he [God] is omnipotent because “he can do everything he wills”, not because “he can do everything”.’</p>	<p>It would seem that he is called almighty because he can do whatsoever he wills. For Augustine says: He is called almighty for no other reason but that he can do</p>	<p><i>Q.d. De potentia, q. 1, art. 7, arg. 3: ‘Item videtur quod dicatur omnipotens quia potest omnia quae vult: dicit enim Augustinus in Enchiridion: non ob aliud vocatur omnipotens, nisi</i></p>

<p>n. 14 Dicendum, quod Augustinus ex hoc <habet> ‘vult’, quia inter ‘omnia’ includuntur mala, que Deus non potest. Ideo sic loquitur.</p>	<p>To this it should be said that Augustine says ‘wills’ because by ‘everything’ he also understood to include the evil things that God is not able to do. And that is why he [Augustine] spoke in this way.</p>	<p>whatsoever he wills.</p>	<p>quia quidquid vult, potest.’</p>
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